

DRAGON

Daddy Diaries

A Girl Grows to Greatness



4

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ILLUSTRATOR Sencha



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Preface

I've grown quite used to writing in my diary about Olivia. As I've written before, our life has been changing with the years, slowly but surely. She's the King's Pupil, and still a student at the Florence Royal Academy for Girls, but all sorts of people have come to rely on her.

And somehow, even I have managed to make some friends. For example, there's Phyllis the Elven Philosopher-Queen, the Dark Emperor Thanatos, the dracoshaman Esmeralda, and Martell, a woman who took on the role of foster mother for all sorts of orphaned Dark-kin children. They have all come to see me not just as an elder dragon, but as Olivia's daddy. I never imagined that something like this could happen in my life.

I think I'll write a bit more about Olivia's and my adventure to find the Seven Supreme Hallows. There were two more that we met on that journey who were very kind, and their story was a little sad...but to us, they became precious friends. They lived on a faraway continent where no human—er, no *people* had set foot for a long, long time.

Thanks to our adventure, Olivia found a dream for her future. It's a wonderful dream that suits her perfectly.

Our lives together continue on. I pray that in the future, that dream of hers will come true and the path she follows will be overflowing with happiness.

I'll continue to write in this diary with those wishes in mind.

—Eldraco

Chapter 1: Mr. Dragon Befriends a Fellow Father

After our great adventure in the Dark Realm, the rest of summer vacation passed by peacefully. Olivia enjoyed what little time we had left in summer back at home, not wasting a single day.

“Daddy, let’s make pudding today!”

“I-I found some worms in the herb garden...”

“Hey, do you know the story about the summer stars, the Weaver Princess and the Cowherd Prince?!”

“Let’s all sleep together tonight!”

Being pulled around by Olivia’s innocent selfishness was extremely fun.

Olivia had also set up *Demon’s Gates* connecting our home with the homes of her friends, so we had a lot more visitors than before. The Dark Queen became rather shy whenever her sister Martell visited, but she seemed very happy. The little soldier Iriya had also taken an interest in the Dark-kin style of martial arts and often came to learn from Miss Clowria. And the pudding I worked so hard on ended up being bigger than the Dark Queen herself, but luckily, we had so many guests that we were still able to finish it.

Thank goodness. I wouldn’t have wanted any of it to go to waste!

We also had one more guest that began to visit us regularly...

“Y-Yo, Elder Dragon. H-H-How’s it going...?” The Dark Emperor Thanatos, the Dark Queen’s father, stood around in his trademark clumsy, relaxed pose. The fountain beneath our home was connected to the Dark Realm, so ever since the incident with the Vastearth Shield, he had come to visit every so often.

“Oh, hello, Mr. Thanatos!”

“Thanks for having me. Where is Olivia?”

“She’s having a nap.”

“A nap, huh? My daughter used to take naps like that. Of course, that was fifteen hundred years ago!”

“Actually, she’s also taking a nap with Olivia right now...”

“My daughter still takes naps?!”

As we chatted, I served him a rich chiffon cake topped with thick custard. In exchange, he handed me some black powder. It was a deal between dads.

“This is the Dark Realm’s famous jet-black beverage,” he explained.

“You called it ‘coffee,’ right?”

“All you need to do is add some hot water to it. Please make some for us, Elder Dragon.”

“Got it. This stuff... It’s so bitter...”

“Black coffee has been an invaluable ally to me in my work as the Dark Emperor. But if you think it’s too bitter, feel free to add some milk and sugar.”

We talked over cake and coffee. He was very curious about Miss Maredia, so we spoke about her often. I enjoyed having a chance to talk about Olivia with someone other than the people at the academy and those we lived with. I know so very little about how others raise their children, after all.

“If you’re that worried about the Dark Queen, are you sure you don’t want to see her?”

“It wouldn’t do to intrude. I treated her with such cruelty over the years... I don’t want to rush trying to reconcile with her, if it’s possible at all,” Thanatos said with a frown. In the past, he had treated her as a subordinate rather than as his daughter, and now he regretted that. I was also lending him some of my books on raising children. For now, he thought the Dark Queen’s feelings were most important.

“I do hope you two can make up soon.”

“Ah, thank you, Elder Dragon,” Thanatos flashed me a smile. With his pale face and the dark circles under his eyes, he could give quite the scary impression. It might have even been enough to make Olivia cry! “Well, I’m pretty lucky. Dark-kin live for so long that we’re both still alive for me to make

my apology. If one of us had died before I had gotten the chance, I'd be left regretting it forever."

"S-Separated, forever...?!"

"Whoa, you don't have to cry! It was just a hypothetical!"

Tears started to pour from my eyes. *This could've been dangerous. If I had been in my dragon form, that could have created a new waterfall.*

Thanatos continued. "I suppose those sorts of things happen all the time in the human world."

"I guess so..."

"Wow! This cake is delicious, Elder Dragon!" Seeing Thanatos enjoying the cake, I couldn't help but see the family resemblance between him and the Dark Queen.

We often talked about things I couldn't discuss with other people. I guess this is what it meant to be dad friends.

* * *

"By the way, Elder Dragon," Thanatos said, over his third cup of coffee.

"What is it?"

"What happened with your search for the Seven Supreme Hallows?"

"Oh right, we still have your Vastearth Shield, don't we?"

"The Ring, yes. It now belongs to Maredia so I cannot complain, but it is needed for the protection of the Dark Realm, so I would like it returned as soon as possible..."

"Well, we've been having trouble getting the last one, the Leafwind Bow," I explained.

"Is that so?"

"So we've decided to do the ritual without it."

"The ritual?"

"Yeah, the Shooting Star Ritual. Apparently, it's to release the built-up magic

inside the Hallows.”

“I see. That sounds like a waste.”

“They say that the power built up inside them is too dangerous for humans, apparently.”

“I guess that *does* sound convincing, coming from you. Whether good or bad, humans only managed to rise to prosperity after the decline of the dragons.”

Did I sleep through something like that? I guess my dragon friends from long, long ago were almost all gone by now.

“But a festival? That sounds exciting,” Thanatos said. A festival is one of those events where people play music and dance a lot.

“Yeah, I think this will be my first one.”

“Hm? Does that make it Olivia’s first experience as well?”

“I suppose! Or at least I think so.”

“Then make sure you enjoy it. Oh, I should probably get going. I know that my work’s piling up for me while I’m away.”

“You always seem so busy. Be careful on your way home!”

With a wave, Thanatos and I said our goodbyes. He ended up not seeing the Dark Queen today either.

“Olivia will probably be waking up soon, I imagine.”

Our calm vacation had passed by in the blink of an eye. Tomorrow, we’d be heading to the capital again. After searching for the Seven Supreme Hallows as the King’s Pupil, Olivia had been summoned for the Shooting Star Ritual. I was allowed to attend too, since I was her daddy.

“Heh heh. A festival, huh? I’m looking forward to it.”

As I cut a piece of cake to save for Olivia, I started humming a tune to myself without even realizing it.

* * *

“You’ve never been to a festival before?!” Olivia shouted in surprise from

atop my back as we flew high in the sky. Gliding through the air in my dragon form felt nice, but with autumn approaching, the wind was starting to feel a little cold. I was worried it might be too much for Olivia, but the heavily ornamented cape she wore as part of her King's Pupil uniform made me feel a little better.

"That's right. Wait, isn't it *your* first time too?"

"We have the Academy Festival every fall at school. Miss Maredia and Clowria came last year too."

"Academy Festival?!" I didn't know anything about that! Though now that I thought about it, she might've mentioned something about it in one of her letters... Sometimes, something that happened last year felt like it was a hundred years ago. After all, I had learned a lot more in the time I had spent living with Olivia than I had while sleeping for a thousand years in the mountains.

"So, Daddy! There're tons of stands at a festival. And everyone dances and sings and puts on plays!"

"I see, I see."

Olivia began to happily explain what happened at these events. I was starting to feel like Olivia's single year at school had taught her more about human life than I'd realized. It was kind of a bittersweet feeling, but in the end, I was happy to see her grow.

"Also, Daisy told me about candy apples! They're supposed to be super tasty!"

"What are those?"

"She said they're small apples put on a stick and coated in shiny candy."

"Wow, the whole thing?"

"Yep! I bet I could eat a hundred of them!" She seemed really excited at the thought of them being sold at the festival. The way she got worked up was just so adorable.

"You'll get sick if you eat that many."

“Tee hee, I guess so. How many do you think you could eat, Daddy?”

“Hmm, if they’re apples...maybe about ten orchards’ worth?” I wouldn’t, though. If I just sucked up all the apples like that, the farmers would be in a lot of trouble!

“That’s amazing! Is that why you’re so big?”

“Uhh, I don’t know.” *Was I able to eat so much because I was so big, or was I so big because I ate so much?* It was an awfully philosophical question. I’d expect nothing less from my Olivia.

“Oh, by the way,” Olivia changed the topic.

“Yes?”

“I have some homework I need to do over the summer.”

“Even on vacation?”

“Yeah,” Olivia nodded, seeming a little less energetic than before. “Actually, I’ve been trying really hard, but I can’t figure it out.”

“That’s rare for you.” Summer vacation at the Florence Royal Academy for Girls was somehow both long and very, very short. At the last parent-teacher conference, they’d told me that aside from occasionally damaging school property, Olivia was extremely talented and always finished her homework in a single day. I had figured her assignments would have been long done by now.

“Did you tell your teacher it would be late?”

“Yeah. Miss Maredia said that it’s better to be honest in situations like this.”

Ah, I see. Whenever she couldn’t ask me about something, she asked the Dark Queen. I was thankful she had someone to talk to, but it still made me feel a little lonely.

“It’s an essay about my future dreams.”

“Your dream...” Her future. In other words, when she became an adult.

“You always say all I have to do is live happily with people, right?” Olivia said.

“Yeah.”

“But I’m so happy right now... It’s kind of hard to imagine what the future will be like.”

“Hmm...” I ended up sinking into thought as well. Olivia—the girl who had been abandoned in the snow on that fateful day—now said she was enjoying life. That made me incredibly happy.

“Take your time thinking about it.”

“Is that really okay? It’s my homework.”

“Yeah, I think so.” That was my honest feeling, not something I had learned from any book on raising children. Homework like that was crazy! I had been living for thousands of years, and I never thought about the future like that.

“Heh heh... This might be the first time I ever skipped my homework, then.”

“That’s fine. I’ve never done any homework either.”

We talked as we soared through the clouds, with the capital of Shutora coming into view below us.

* * *

Esmeralda and Luca greeted us when we arrived at Shutora Castle. As a leader among the mages of the Royal Court and her disciple, the two of them lived at the castle, so it was something like their home.

“Olivia dearest!”

“Long time no see, Luca.” Luca wore the same King’s Pupil uniform that Olivia did. The two of them made a picture-perfect pair!

“The Shooting Star Ritual’s main act will finally commence tomorrow!”

“The main act... Is there some kind of practice run?”

“No practice at all,” Esmeralda answered me. She was a cool woman with silver hair and dragon blood. The Twilight Crown that she always wore, which was actually one of the Seven Supreme Hallows, was conspicuously missing. It was probably being prepared to be used in the ritual. “We’ve spent the past thirty days getting ready for the magic to be released.”

“Thirty days?!”

“Yeah, it’s been a few hundred years since we last did it. We’re a little out of practice.” Now that she mentioned it, Esmeralda *did* look a little tired. She had dark circles under her eyes.

“What did you do for those thirty days?”

“Rehearsals, rehearsals, and more rehearsals.”

“For that long?!”

Noticing my gaze, Esmeralda sighed with a shrug. “Hey, getting ready for this ritual is back-breaking work.”

Olivia turned to Luca. “Hey Luca, what are you going to wish for?”

“Hm? A wish?”

“The Shooting Star Ritual can grant any wish, right?”

If I recalled correctly, the queen had said that the Shooting Star Ritual—the ceremony that freed the magic built up inside the Seven Supreme Hallows—could grant any wish. I was personally considering asking for a new oven for our kitchen.

“Yeah, but that was if we managed to get *all* of the Hallows,” Esmeralda explained. “We didn’t find the Leafwind Bow, so this time we’re releasing the magic just to be safe.”

“Oh, really?” Olivia looked a little disappointed.

“Granting a wish is really a metaphor for ‘providing more magic than a human could ever use.’ We’re better off not having something like that anyway. It took us until this morning just to make a spell that could release the energy from the six jewels at once. Phyllis helped us a lot.”

“Miss Phyllis is here?!” Olivia exclaimed. The Elven Philosopher-Queen was the Director of the Florence Royal Academy for Girls. The moment her name left Olivia’s lips, high-pitched laughter filled the air.

“Oh ho ho! Did someone call for me?”

“Not really.”

“How cruel, Esmeralda!”

A younger voice called out as well. “Sir Eldraco, Olivia, it’s good to see you again...”

“Oh, Seraphy!” Olivia greeted her.

Seraphy, Phyllis’s daughter and a genius gardener, peeked her head out from behind her mother’s brightly shining clothes.

“Umm, I changed up the castle garden a little... I planted some flowers for the Shooting Star Ritual, so if you like, you can go take a look.”

“I’d love to!” The gardens that Seraphy created were absolutely breathtaking. We definitely had to go take a look later.

“Anyway, Phyllis, is the defensive barrier okay?” Esmeralda asked.

“Yes, there are no problems.” Because it was needed for the Shooting Star Ritual, Phyllis was unable to use her pride and joy, the Gem-Staff of Eternity. Even without it, however, her protective magic was said to be first-class. Though Olivia *did* smash it with a single punch that one time...

“The ritual will take place tonight when the seven stars circling the star of origin marking true north reach their zenith,” Esmeralda said in a dignified voice. “We’ll look forward to seeing you then, Olivia.”

“O-Of course!” Olivia replied with a smart bow.

“The ritual will be public to honor you as well, since you gathered so many of the Hallows for us,” Esmeralda added.

“We should take a good long nap today so we can stay up late tonight,” I suggested.

“Okay!”

“I of course want you to enjoy the festival tonight to the fullest, but do make sure you take care of yourself.”

“Yes, Miss Phyllis!” Olivia nodded.

Later, after I caught Olivia sneaking out of her bed, the two of us headed off to enjoy the festival in the capital. Since it was the first time we had gone out

with just the two of us in a while, it was a lot of fun!

* * *

“Ooh, this way, Clowria!”

“My liege, if you run like that, you’ll end up getting lost.”

“Haugh... You don’t have to treat me like a child.”

Wearing matching hats and rings featuring each other’s colors, Maredia and Clowria finally made their way through the crowds to the central square of the Shutora City Festival.

There were stands, stands, and more stands everywhere. And people, people, and even more people!

Since the Dark Queen spent almost a thousand years holed up in her castle, seeing Maredia enjoying herself in a place like this was almost a miracle to Clowria. And the Dark Queen wasn’t even in her cat form to avoid catching attention—she was in her normal humanoid one. After their adventure in the Dark Realm, she had begun associating with more people, started to close the gap between herself and her father and siblings, and had slowly but surely started going outside.

Clowria chuckled quietly. “I am glad you have grown capable of acting without clinging to me.”

“Haugh? Did you say something?”

“No, nothing at all. Now, it would not do for us to be separated. Your Darkness, please give me your hand.”

“Hmph! But...fine. I would feel bad for you if you got lost, after all!”

They walked hand in hand toward the main stage where the Shooting Star Ritual would be held. The area was lavishly decorated and under heavy guard. Beautiful priestesses stood around singing. People had come from far and wide to see the ritual, their eyes sparkling as they waited in anticipation.

“Ohh, they really went all out on the decorations,” Maredia observed.

“This is where they will have Olivia’s award ceremony?! I-I cannot help but feel anxious!”

“I’m nervous too!”

“I hope we can find the elder dragon without too much difficulty, my Queen.”

Before the Shooting Star Ritual would be held, there would be an award ceremony to honor the pride of the kingdom, the future Great Wizard Olivia Eldraco. That would be the first time the Hallows she had gathered would be shown to the public. Maredia and Clowria had come just to see Olivia in her finest.

“Om nom nom...”

“My Queen...are you sure you are not overeating?”



Maredia answered her, but her words were totally unintelligible due to the food she had stuffed in her mouth.

“I have not the slightest clue what you just said...”

Maredia’s hands were full of food she had bought from the stalls they had walked by. The Dark Queen was now eating her way through it all.

“Shaved ice, fried noodles, cotton candy, and meat skewers!”

“Your Darkness, that is far too much!”

“The elder dragon’s cooking is superb, but sometimes I just want B-grade food like this! You get it, don’t you, Clowria?”

Clowria sighed. “And what about your pride as a queen of the Dark-kin?”

“It’s too late for that! Here, you can have half.”

“E-Even so...” Clowria cleared her throat. “I suppose it would be unacceptable for me to trample over your desires like that. Even just a little while ago, it took all you had just to step outside. The greed of the Dark-kin is truly boundless...”

Sunset arrived and the sky turned from blue to purple before taking on a deep orange hue. With her snacks safely secured in her stomach, Maredia let out a cry of surprise at the sight before her. As the singing around them grew louder, Olivia stepped onto the stage. Her King’s Pupil uniform gave her a very mature look.

“Olivia’s here! Haugh, I... I can’t see!”

“Sh-Shall I lift you up on my shoulders?!”

“No, that would be super lame!” As Maredia bounced up and down, the crowd in front of her gave wry smiles as they stepped out of her way. “Luca’s there too!”

“So she is, my Queen.”

Seeing the two girls onstage made the women feel quite proud.

Once, the Dark and Human Realms had been enemies. They had fought over territory and Maredia’s side had lost. Dark-kin had been in conflict with humans for years, but now the Dark Queen that had antagonized them was smiling

brightly in the center of the human world, the capital of Shutora. Though no one noticed, it was truly a revolutionary event.

“Heeey, Olivia!!!”

“Oh, she looked at us.”

Olivia returned Maredia’s energetic waving with a wave of her own, earning her a swift rebuke from Phyllis at her side.

“Whoa, she’s the King’s Pupil?!”

“She’s so cute!”

“I’ve been a fan ever since I saw her in the paper!”

The people around them heaped all sorts of praise on Olivia. Her adorable, innocent nature had captured the hearts of everyone.

“It looks like it’s finally time for the award ceremony.”

“Indeed!”

Olivia’s award ceremony. And though it was only an improvised version with some of the Hallows still out of their grasp, the Shooting Star Ritual would follow.

Chapter 2: Mr. Dragon Participates in the Shooting Star Ritual

“Olivia, Mr. Eldraco, Her Majesty the Queen is arriving. Be sure to mind your manners!” Phyllis turned to us with a look of terrible concern.

“Okay!”

“Leave it to us, Miss Phyllis.” I had made sure to be in my human form today so I wouldn’t destroy anything by accident with my dragon strength.

I was wearing the uniform Phyllis had given me. I even got Olivia’s seal of approval on how cool I looked! Olivia herself was in her King’s Pupil uniform. Luca fidgeted nervously beside her in a matching outfit, though they each wore some extra ribbons and lace to give both of them their own unique cuteness. The sleeves they wore today were much fancier than those of their usual uniforms. Olivia had been ecstatic because she thought she looked like a princess.

How can I describe it? She was the most beautiful girl I’d seen in ten thousand years!

“Heh... Heh heh...” I started smiling without thinking. From the stage, I was happy to see the Dark Queen and Miss Clowria in the crowd, mixed in with all the other people that had come to see Olivia.

Look, everybody! My daughter is incredibly cute!

I had never felt something like this in all the time we had lived together in the mountains or in all the time I had raised her. It seemed even someone as old as I could come across new feelings.

As I thought that, a man in a crisp uniform started to shout in a strong voice. It was almost like he was howling.

“Her Majesty, the Queen of Shutora, has arrived!”

A surge of excitement passed through the crowd. Apparently, it was super

rare for the queen to show herself in public. Surrounded by ladies of the court, the queen stepped our way. She had been hidden behind a curtain when we met her previously, so this was the first time we were seeing her face.

“Come now, you are supposed to bow,” Miss Phyllis instructed us.

“Eh? Oh!” Matching her image as a princess, Olivia gave a graceful bow, pinching the edges of her skirt. Thinking back to when I had played the role of a prince in my games with Olivia long ago, I also lowered my head. After a while, I heard quiet whispering somewhere nearby.

“Ah, Esmeralda... Where is the dragon?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. The elder dragon is right there.”

“Hm? That appears to be a human man to me...”

“Yes. Powerful magical beings are capable of changing their form like that. I believe his human form is quite fetching as well.”

“Is that so? I was looking forward to meeting this dragon... He must be so large and strong. Perhaps inside the castle would be too dangerous, but now that we are outside...”

“M-Maybe next time, Your Majesty...”

“I suppose. That is a shame. My dream of riding on the back of a dragon seems still rather far off...”

I remembered the queen as having a mature, refined voice, but she sounded much more childlike talking to someone she was close to.

“King’s Pupil, Olivia Eldraco. And her father, as well. Please raise your heads.”

“Y-Yes, Your Majesty!”

At her instruction, we looked up, and...

“Thank you for your work in locating the Seven Supreme Hallows. I have heard of your great achievements.” The girl speaking looked not much older than Olivia. On her head was a sparkling crown, and her dress was more luxurious than any I had ever seen. Despite appearing to be a child, she had a mysterious, almost magical aura. There was no doubt that she was the queen.

But she's so small?!

"Thanks to your efforts, we will be able to hold the Shooting Star Ritual, though imperfect. I am sure my father, the late king, would be ecstatic. Thank you, Olivia, Mr. Dragon." The queen thanked us with a faint smile. Before I had a chance to respond, the man from before shouted again.

"The award ceremony for King's Pupil Olivia Eldraco shall now commence!"

Excited murmurs shot through the crowd again. I heard more whispers from the crowd.

"She's so cute!"

"She might even be cuter than the queen!"

That's right, that's right. My Olivia is so adorable!

The queen gave a pleasant smile.

"I wonder what kind of person you will be when you finish your term as the King's Pupil and become an adult."

"Huh?" Hearing someone her own age talk about the future like that must have been quite a shock to her and Olivia seemed stunned. "I have...no idea. I've never thought about it."

"Oh my."

"Tee hee, I just want to stay with Daddy forever."

"I see. I have many dreams for the future. Though I have my duties as queen, there are many things I would like to accomplish. If you ever think of a dream for your future, please let me know."

Olivia returned the queen's smile with a small nod.

I sank into thought. *What does Olivia want to do in the future?* I had never thought about it either. Our current life was just too much fun.

Olivia and Luca were handed bouquets of flowers decorated with intricate silverwork. The silver was so thin it looked like it could be used as a toothpick. *It's probably best if I don't touch that myself.*

As the queen's speech came to an end, Esmeralda spoke about Olivia and Luca's search for the Seven Supreme Hallows to the crowd. It was a fairly long story, but no one seemed to get bored. There were even cheers when she got to some of the high points, like our journey to the Dark Realm! I couldn't help but smile a little seeing Olivia give a little yawn as she began to grow tired.

"After being lost for so long, the majority of the Seven Supreme Hallows have finally been gathered together again, as we have acquired six of them. For this momentous occasion, Her Majesty the Queen has decreed that all of humanity shall be given the opportunity to bear witness to them!"

At Esmeralda's words, the tension in the crowd spiked. They were all excited to see the Hallows, treasures that they had previously thought only existed in fairy tales.

I understood how they felt. Sparkly jewels and gold make me really excited too! I've always collected shiny jewels.

Under the protection of the knights, the court ladies brought out the Seven Supreme Hallows. Excitement filled the air.

"Hm...?" I tilted my head to the side. I thought I heard something, so I looked around.

"What's wrong, Daddy?" Olivia asked.

Maybe it was just my imagination, but I thought I heard some kind of sharp sound just then.

* * *

"Bring the Supreme Hallows here—"

The Leafwind Bow and the Lost Origin had yet to be found, but five of the Hallows were enough. Having just received her award, Olivia made her way back to the center of the stage to introduce the five jewels to the crowd. Her King's Pupil uniform made her look older than her thirteen years.

Actually, she looked much more like a proper lady than I had imagined she would. Facing the queen, she gave an elegant bow. It was a totally different side of her than the innocence I normally saw.

She really looked like an actual princess. Without me even realizing it, she had picked up all sorts of things about how to live in human society. Despite all she had learned, she was always the same when she was with me. The child-rearing books I'd read so many times had stressed that parents should aim to be a source of peace, safety, and trust for their children. Seeing her like this, I felt like I had totally succeeded in doing that.

The sight made me tear up a little, but that didn't stop me from smiling. I couldn't help but feel a little embarrassed at showing my feelings so clearly in front of so many people.

Long, long ago, when I had still been living alone in the mountains, humans had come to find me. They called me their god and danced and sang all around me, but I didn't move even a single scale. I just pretended to be asleep and thought that they were getting in the way of my naps. I just wanted them to go home.

But now? I couldn't stop myself from grinning. Maybe it was because I was in my human form. Human cheeks are really soft, you know. Olivia taught me that.

"Wow, she's so cute!"

"Olivia is cute, but look at Luca too!"

"Look how happy she looks. I thought the King's Pupil would be some sort of cold, detached genius... But now I want to cheer for her even more."

"Heh, and look at her father over there! You can tell where she gets that kind face from."

"Huh? I thought the rumors said that Olivia Eldraco was raised by a dragon—"

"Ha ha, no way. Raised by a dragon? That's ridiculous!"

Despite the solemn atmosphere of the presentation, I could hear all sorts of people whispering in the crowd. Dragons have really good ears, so we can hear really well. And between all the rumors, I still could hear the Dark Queen at the

front of the crowd puffing up with pride.

That made it all the harder to ignore the strange sound I had heard. It had sounded like the wind, but was also different than any sound I had heard before. Apparently no one else had heard it though, and the ceremony continued.

“Citizens of Shutora, let us present to you the five Supreme Hallows.”

With that announcement, the crowd’s excitement spiked. The five jewels were lifted up high.

“Under Phyllis Florence’s protection, the Gem of Light.”

“Under Esmeralda Serpentina’s protection, the Gem of Darkness.”

“Uncovered by the King’s Pupils, the long lost Gem of Fire, and the Gem of Water.”

“And finally, a symbol of friendship from the distant Dark Realm, the Gem of Earth.”

“Though we were unable to secure all seven Hallows, Her Majesty the Queen has decreed that we perform a modified Shooting Star Ritual to release the magic stored within them!”

The sparkling jewels seemed to glow brighter than they would have in the sunlight. The crowd roared with cheers and applause.

“Seven glittering lights to one star.

One star for one wish.

Grant it and shine, Shooting Star.”

The singing of an old folk song mixed with laughter could be heard all around. A festive mood hung over the whole square. “...Huh?”

Then it happened. There was a sudden gust of wind...but it wasn’t just any old wind.

I jumped forward to cover Olivia as screams erupted from the crowd.

“Everyone, under my wings!” I changed into my dragon form, stretching my large wings out to protect everyone as I looked up at the sky. “Is that...a flying person?”

Controlling the squall from up above us was a man with an incredibly stern face. Though he was high up in the sky, my eyes were still able to see him clearly enough that I could tell he looked oddly familiar.

“Wait, isn’t that...?” He brought to mind some children’s picture books that I had read about the Six Sages of Riari. Phyllis and Esmeralda were supposed to be the only ones still alive since they were members of species with longer life spans.

However, I had met another one of them before. He had been a young human man, a wizard who had barely begun to learn magic, and he had climbed my mountain in hopes of seeing a dragon himself.

“...Vandilsen?”

The figure in the sky quickly gathered up the Hallows before disappearing with another gust of wind.

“Look out!”

A dry rattling sound filled the air. The people had relaxed after the sudden storm had stopped, but the last strong blast of wind ripped off the tops of the taller buildings around us. Broken pieces of roof fell down over the square. The debris was hard and sharp, taking me by surprise even in my dragon form.

Should I breathe some fire to burn it all up? I could easily decide what my fire would burn so it wouldn’t hurt any of the people, but I had never tried to protect so many people with it at once before. *Could I do it? Would fire even help against rubble like that?*

I *could* just use my breath to send the debris flying away...but if I did that, the people in the square around me would also be blown into the sky. They’d get really hurt when they hit the ground.

But if the debris hit the people, it would be worse. Their cheeks were soft, and so were their heads and the rest of their bodies.

Besides, Olivia was under my wings. If I didn't move, she would definitely be safe. The Dark Queen had used some sort of magic to protect herself, and perhaps by accident the people around her as well. Phyllis and Esmeralda were focused on protecting the young queen.

Unsure of what to do, I stood there, paralyzed.

“—No!”

Olivia jumped out from under my wings.

“Huh?”

The rubble was almost upon the crowd. Many people had gathered to see the Shooting Star Ritual. They were packed so tightly that it would be difficult for them to dodge the falling debris. Olivia ran out, lifting up both hands.

“Protect everyone!!!”

A burst of warm white light poured out from Olivia's body. The falling debris froze in midair...and then started moving. It was transforming!

“Wh-What's happening?!” Confused chatter erupted from the crowd. Now a little calmer, the people were able to evacuate away from where the rubble was falling. And in the next moment...

Meow——♪

The rubble finished transforming and started to make cute sounds. Olivia had created many copies of her specialty—cat golems—from the debris. But even for someone like her, transforming that many objects at once was incredible. Even Phyllis and Esmeralda were surprised and began heaping praise on her.

“Phew... That was close...” Olivia gave a sigh of relief.

Meow—♪

Mew—♪

Graa—♪

The people in the square were immediately captivated by the sudden appearance of an army of cats!

“Th-They’re so cute!!!” Men and women, children and grandparents, *everyone* was smiling. Dropping to their knees, they reached out toward the little cats. *Wait, isn’t that the same pose those people took way back then when they were calling me a god or something?*

“Haugh... It seems whether we’re human or Dark-kin, we are all servants of cat-kind...” Even the Dark Queen was smiling brightly, having wrapped her arms around one of the cats. At any rate, it seemed like we had avoided any serious injuries in the crowd.

“Phew... I did it, Daddy!”

As I hurriedly returned to my human form, Olivia grabbed me in a big hug.

“Yeah, I saw! I’m glad everyone’s okay!”

“Tee hee! I’m glad no one was hurt!” Olivia was smiling, but I felt like I needed to reflect on my actions a little. I had only thought of the other people in the crowd as secondary. All I had been worried about was Olivia...

“You’re really kind, Olivia. Really.”

“Ack! Daddy, that hurts!” Olivia began to panic.

Stopping to listen, I could hear the crowd cheering.

“That was amazing! That’s the King’s Pupil for you!”

“She isn’t just cute. She’s kind and strong too!”

“We’re your biggest fans, Olivia!”

They all started shouting her name, some of them holding up the cat golems she had made. The fact that so many people had seen Olivia’s cuteness and kindness firsthand filled me with a wonderful feeling.

Though...I supposed losing the Hallows was a *big* problem.

* * *

“Such a large-scale spell to create golems...and with no incantation or preparation...!” Phyllis muttered, shocked. We could still hear the meowing of the golems Olivia had created. I quickly glanced over at the queen and saw that she was shaking and staring directly at me.

“O-One more time...!”

“Huh?”

“Your dragon form was...so cool...! I want to see it again!”

“What?!”

“Your Majesty?! The Hallows have been stolen, you know!”

“Ah, y-yes...my apologies.” The queen seemed dejected.

Wow, does she really like dragons that much? For her to be thinking about me in this situation, maybe she was more of an airhead than I thought...

“She can’t help it. Daddy is just that cool!”

“Thanks, Olivia.”

“Heeey, Olivia! Elder Dragon!”

“Miss Dark Queen!”

“Haugh, you are both safe! Thank goodness!”

“That was a magician of quite some skill,” Clowria said. “I thought he might have been Dark-kin like us, but that does not appear to be the case.”

“Yeah...” I couldn’t tell them that it might have been someone I had met before. Maybe I was mistaken. And humans don’t live that long either, do they? I’d met Vandilsen over a thousand years ago. He should have been nothing but bones by now. “Hm...?” As I lifted my face, I noticed the people in the square staring at us.

“Olivia!”

“Thank you!”

“And you too, Dark-kin girl! I guess there are some good Dark-kin out there after all!”

“The two of them are so cute!”

Cheers for Olivia echoed through the square once again. Both she and the Dark Queen seemed taken aback by the sudden attention. Olivia grabbed on to me tightly.

Yeah, I can understand why you'd be surprised. Being praised like that by so many people you didn't know would be quite a shock, wouldn't it?

“Yeah! Let's give them a round of applause!”

“She's so cute... Let's start a fan club!”

“That magic before...it's like she's a saint! The Kitty Saint!”

“Aww, there's already a fan club for her. Looks like you missed your chance!”

The Kitty Saint, huh...

As we stood around in shock, the kingdom's knights came to evacuate everyone safely. Thanks to their efforts, the panic began to gradually subside. Though Olivia still clung to me nervously, when people in the crowd waved to her, she waved back.

“Whooooaa! She looked at me!!!”

“Ah!”

I knew I had worked hard to raise her in a way that she could live in human society, but this was too much. There was no point in staying right now if all of the attention was scaring her.

“Dearest Olivia, come this way.”

“Luca!”

Luca guided us back to the castle, using water magic to hide us and keep the crowd away.

Though the people in the crowd were mostly excited by Olivia's performance, there were some uneasy whispers mixed in.

“Now what? The Seven Supreme Hallows were really important, weren't they?”

“A wizard snuck into the kingdom? I’ll be too scared to sleep at night...”

“This is an issue of national security.”

What does “national security” mean?

Anyway, the Shooting Star Ritual had ended in a mess. As we made our way back to the castle, someone called out to me.

“Excuse me, Mr. Eldraco.”

“Oh, Miss Phyllis.”

“That wizard... I believe I recognized him...”

Oh, really? Phyllis herself was a great wizard from long ago and another member of the Six Sages of Riari, so she had likely met him before...

“So it really *was* him?”

“Yes... The wizard Vandilsen disappeared over a thousand years ago. He was the most powerful wizard humanity ever produced, but...why?”

* * *

Vandilsen did his best to suppress his excitement as he made his way back to his castle. It stood in an abandoned, barren wasteland that people called the Dead Continent. It was all that was left of a once-proud kingdom.

He arrived in no time at all. Thanks to the Leafwind Bow, the incredibly difficult spell *Levitation* had become a matter of course for him. He could move as fast as the wind, and to anyone watching, it simply looked like teleportation. That was the type of power one of the Seven Supreme Hallows held. With the Leafwind Bow, he could do anything. Flight was only a dream for normal humans.

And there was one more dream they all shared...

“With this... The key to immortality is in my hands!” His face split into a smile. “Heh heh... I won’t need this *Life Absorption* spell anymore. I won’t have that darkness behind me anymore...” Vandilsen muttered these things to himself as he hurried back to his room.

It was a simple room, with nothing more than a single bed on top of a magic

circle.

“Wait for me. We’re finally going to find happiness,” Vandilsen spoke to the boy lying on the bed in a gentle voice.

The boy on the bed had shining silver hair. His complexion looked poor, and one could tell he had been sick for a long time at a single glance. As he breathed faintly in his sleep, that boy’s name was—

“Wait for me, Oliver.”

Oliver.

He was the prince who had been asleep for over a thousand years and had not opened his eyes once in all that time.



* * *

“Daddy, by ‘Vandilsen,’ do you mean the one that’s one of the Six Sages of Riari?” Olivia asked, her eyes shining. We were in a meeting room in Shutora Castle, discussing the events that had just taken place. Phyllis and I had been discussing the fact that the wizard that had appeared had looked a lot like Vandilsen.

“That’s right, Olivia.”

“The real one from those books we used to read together?”

“Yeah, it looks like it.”

Back when he had visited me on the mountain all those years ago, Vandilsen had been a fledgling wizard. He had been so young that I had thought he had probably only been born a few seconds before we met. Thinking back on it now, he had most likely been about twenty years old. *Sorry for thinking about you in dragon’s terms, Vandilsen!*

“That’s amazing! The Sage Vandilsen was an amazing wizard that brought medicine and pharmaceuticals into the Human Realm!”

“Ah, you stole my line!” Luca interrupted. “But Milady Esmeralda and Miss Phyllis are also great Sages that left their names in human history.”

“From what I remember, he was a very kind...very *timid* boy, who often got teased by Esmeralda,” Phyllis added.

“Hey, Phyllis, you’re making me look bad,” Esmeralda complained.

“Ahem. Anyway, he was not the type to do something so violent.”

“Haugh? But this Vandilsen was a human, right?” the Dark Queen asked.

“Yes, or that was what we thought...” Phyllis answered. “That is why this is so confusing.”

“Haugh... I guess he should have died a long time ago, huh?”

Everyone was puzzled.

“Actually... The last time I saw Vandilsen, he had that child with him... And he was...”

“Yes, he likely belonged to one of the long-lived races,” Esmeralda said.

“What do you mean?”

“Elves, dragon-kin, dwarves, Dark-kin... It’s a term used for races that have life spans much longer than those of humans,” Luca explained.

“I see...”

Basically, Vandilsen had been taking care of a child of a different race. I was starting to feel a kind of affinity for him. I wondered if we could become friends if we met again.

“Whoever that man was, the fact of the matter is that he’s stolen the majority of the Seven Supreme Hallows,” Esmeralda stated with a hard expression.

The young queen also nodded, a grave look on her face. “Without those jewels... If another nation were to attack us, we would have neither Phyllis’s protection nor Esmeralda’s full powers to wipe away our foes.”

Phyllis and Esmeralda were both powerful magicians in their own rights. However, they apparently utilized the power stored up in the Hallows to use magic on a huge scale. Without the Hallows, the country was in danger.

“That is not all. There is also the issue of *what* Vandilsen intends to do with the Hallows. If we do not retrieve them immediately, we will all be in danger.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. Also...that wind magic was probably...”

“Yes, it was likely the Leafwind Bow.”

“What? You mean one of the Hallows we weren’t able to find?!” I asked, incredulous.

“Yes. If that is the case, there is a good chance Vandilsen will be able to perform the proper Shooting Star Ritual.”

“The one that can grant any wish...!”

Five of the Hallows had been stolen from us today. The Seven Supreme Hallows covered the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, light, and darkness. Six of them were ruled over by the seventh, the Lost Origin. If Vandilsen also had managed to get his hands on the Lost Origin...

“There is no need to worry about that,” Phyllis shook her head weakly. “While the Lost Origin is said to rule over the other six, and is called the supreme jewel among the Seven Hallows, it has never been confirmed to actually exist.”

“Oh, really? By the way, what does it look like?”

“According to the literature, it is a large jewel with seven stars shining within.”

“Huh.”

“What’s wrong, Elder Dragon?”

“Uhh... Round? With seven stars?”

“Yes. That is what we have been told.”

I realized something.

Round, with stars inside.

“Actually—”

* * *

The whole room exploded into a frenzy at my statement. The Dark Queen looked like she was about to hit the roof!

“Whaaaaaat?! *You* have the Lost Origin?!”

“Yeah.”

“Such an important artifact has been beside our home the whole time...” Clowria all but collapsed. She and the Dark Queen seemed quite shocked by this revelation.

“What was all that searching around in the summer for then...?” the Dark Queen complained.

“I guess I should’ve asked what it looked like in the beginning. Sorry!”

I felt ashamed. According to Phyllis, the Lost Origin was a large, round, beautiful jewel that had seven stars shining inside it. The small races had

apparently argued over its very existence for years and years. It made sense that they never found it because it had been in my shrine the whole time.

“I picked it up a long time ago. It should still be in my shrine.”

“Whaaaaaaat?!”

Despite how serious everyone had been before, they now stared at me, mouths agape. My hobby has always been collecting pretty jewels. Gold is nice too. Honestly, anything that glitters is pretty. Even after I became Olivia’s daddy, I had lived in that shrine for a while.

“Oh, I remember that one!” Olivia exclaimed. “You called it the ‘Shining Stone.’ You promised to give it to me when I got older!”

“A-Are you serious...?”

“Yeah, I’m serious, Miss Phyllis.”

“Ahhh...”

Everyone suddenly looked really tired.

Sorry, everyone! I didn’t know the stone I always liked to stare at was so important...

“What an incredible development... Ah, but that is just what I would expect from an elder dragon!” The queen alone seemed impressed by the news. I was glad that she was so interested in dragons!

“King’s Pupil, Olivia Eldraco! The Lost Origin may be capable of saving our kingdom. Go retrieve it at once!”

“Okay!” Olivia’s excited voice answered the queen’s energetic command. They stood out all the more among the listlessness of the adults around them.

“Olivia! Let’s go get it!”

“Yeah!”

We immediately put the sensitive atmosphere of the meeting room behind us.

* * *

Stepping into the shrine, we were greeted with the familiar sight of shining gold.

“Heh heh, it’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

A mountain of gold that I had slowly collected over my long life sat before us. There were some jewels lying around here and there, but the *really* important ones were hidden deeper inside. When Olivia had been small, we played hide and seek there. Her light brown hair had blended in so perfectly with the gold, and I was always very worried when I couldn’t find her... I never expected her to fall asleep while hiding either.

“Hey, Daddy. The things in the inner room are your most important treasures, right?”

“Yeah, I guess you could say that.” They were the jewels I really liked. For the long years I had spent alone, they had been my only joy.

“More important than me?” Olivia looked up at me, her brow furrowed in a mock frown. The question made me burst out laughing as I stroked her hair.

“Of course not! You’re much more important to me than any jewel. If you asked for it, I’d give everything here to you.”

“Tee hee, yay!” Olivia’s beaming smile was like the sun, even in this dark cavern.

How is she so adorable?! It was just like when she was a tiny girl. Her cuteness hadn’t changed at all with her age.

Our life together had begun in this very shrine. She was just as precious to me now as she was back then, and was only getting more so over time.

“Okay, it’s over here.” I took her into the deepest room. “Do you remember when we used to live here, Olivia?”

“Hmm, I don’t remember everything.” The way she put a finger to her chin as she thought was adorable. “But I do remember it was really fun...and I was really happy.”

“O-Oliviaaaaaa!” I felt my heart explode. I hoped Olivia would be happy forever.

I didn't know why that guy who looked like Vandilsen had taken the Hallows. But what I did know is that if he tried to do something unpleasant with them, it could put Olivia's future in danger.

Fighting wasn't good. There was no way to make everyone happy by fighting. That was why as Olivia's daddy, I wanted to avoid fighting as much as possible.

"With all seven Hallows, you can grant any wish, huh?"

Getting a new oven for the kitchen would be nice. Enough delicious cookies to eat forever would be fun too. But there was no wish that *really* stood out to me. Right now, life was just too happy for us.

"Okay, it's over here." I took her hand in mine. It was bigger than it was when she was younger, but it was still quite tiny.

* * *

"Wow, this is amazing!"

Inside the small room in the depths of the shrine sat a collection of my most important jewels.

"That one is huge! It's as big as a house!"

"Ah, that one! A long time ago, I found a mountain that was one big jewel, so I scraped off a bit of it."

"I didn't think about this when I was younger, but...are we really rich?" Olivia wondered aloud.

The large mound of jewels was bigger than I was in my dragon form, and many of the individual stones were larger than Olivia's face. And right at the center of the little room was the very best one.

"Ah, here it is!"

"It's perfectly round! And you can see the stars in it... So this is the Lost Origin..."

Sitting in the deepest part of the deepest room in my shrine was an incredibly beautiful stone I had picked up a long time ago. This was my most important treasure: a jewel that glowed with the color of the sunset. If you stared into its

perfectly round shape, way in the depths of it, you could see stars shining. There were one, two, three...yeah, all seven were there! This jewel was more powerful and more beautiful than any of the others.

“Wow... It’s beautiful...and it’s glowing.” Olivia was captivated by the stars shining within the stone.

“It’s a little early, but here, a present for you.”

“Huh?”

“I said I’d give it to you when you were older, right? Besides, you need it for work now.” As the King’s Pupil, she had been given a proper job by the queen. Other people were relying on her, and she would also come to rely on others. According to the books I had read, that was just how humans lived. I was a dragon and had lived in the mountains alone forever, but Olivia had a different road ahead of her.

“Tee hee, thank you, Daddy! I’ll be extra careful with it!”

Olivia gave me a big hug.

You’re absolutely welcome. I hope my most precious jewel will help light your path.

* * *

We flew right back to Shutora Castle. The moment Olivia pulled the Lost Origin out of her bag, the whole room erupted in shouts.

“Ohhh... This is the Lost Origin...!”

“Seriously, Elder Dragon...?” the Dark Queen muttered in disbelief. “You actually had an S-Rank item like this just sitting around in your shrine?”

According to human legends, the Lost Origin had the ability to find the other Supreme Hallows’ locations.

Olivia took a deep breath, unfazed by the expectant gazes of everyone else in the room. “Lost Origin, please show me where the other jewels went.”

In response to her voice, the Lost Origin began to shine.

“Ack, it’s so bright!”

A pillar of light shot out from the gem, and a six-colored beam stretched out to the east.

“Whoa, it’s like a giant noodle!” the Dark Queen exclaimed.

“It’s not damaging the wall,” Esmeralda observed, “so I guess it is only showing where the Hallows are.”

“What immen-sive magical power...!”

“So this must be what it looks like when six Hallows are gathered in one place!”

“Whoa, it looks like a rainbow!”

I also found myself enraptured by the glow. “I-I-It’s beautiful!” I found myself getting way too excited. I had a *real* weakness for glittery things. I was so moved by the spectacle that I started to drool a little bit.

“Sir Daddy?!”

“Sir Elder Dragon, please calm down...”

“Ah!” I had accidentally changed into my dragon form as well. Too much excitement does that to me.

Keep it together, Daddy. You’re acting as Olivia’s parent here!

For now, I shrunk myself back down to a smaller size. It sure was lucky for us that the meeting room was so big. The only damage done was a few broken chairs.

Phyllis was talking with Olivia about something or other. “Olivia, can you keep the Lost Origin active like that for a while?”

“Sure, Miss Phyllis.”

“I expected nothing less from you. Instruct all the observatories in Shutora to determine where it is pointing immediately.”

“I’ll go give out the orders,” Esmeralda said. “Let’s go, Luca.”

“Yes, Milady!”

“Please and thank you!” Phyllis said before turning to Olivia. “You are

amazing... Keeping such a large-scale magical response so stable must be very difficult. If you start feeling unwell, please tell me immediately.”

“Okay!”

Phyllis was really a reliable teacher in situations like this, even though she normally was a bit scatterbrained.

“Messenger owls have been sent to the observatories!”

“Lady Esmeralda, Lady Luca, please take up command of the capital’s defensive forces!” the queen ordered.

“Without the power of the Hallows, we’ll have to rely on human strength, right?”

Things had suddenly turned rather hectic. Olivia sat down on one of my feet since I was still in my dragon form. She had always liked sitting there.

“Without you and the Lost Origin, I cannot imagine what we would have done...” Phyllis sighed. “However, we should be able to find the other Hallows now.”

For some reason, the Dark Queen had puffed up proudly once again. “I expected nothing less from Olivia.”

“It’s just as my liege says,” Clowria chuckled along with her.

Esmeralda then stepped up to them, with an expression scary enough to make the Dark Queen flinch.

“You two...”

“Haugh?! Wh-What?!”

“I’ve heard about you. Thanks for being good friends with Luca.”

“Huh...?”

“Likewise! Thank you for providing such a friend for my Queen!”

For a moment, I thought she was just exchanging pleasantries with them, but that seemed to be a mistake. Esmeralda then extended a hand toward the two ladies.

“By the way, you two are Dark-kin...and pretty skilled, right? You made quite an impression long ago.”

“Oh?”

“Huh?”

“The overwhelming power of Dark-kin magic, especially that of the Dark Queen Maredia, is still spoken of today. Can you help with defending the capital?”

“Of course she can!” Luca added, smiling alongside her master.

The Dark Queen jumped in surprise at the request and thought it over a little before answering. “W-Well...I suppose if Luca is asking, then...”

“Thank you, Marie!”

“Okay, come this way. Knights, you come as well.”

The group immediately left to go somewhere else.

It seemed that things were getting pretty serious.

* * *

The pillar of rainbow light stretched far, far to the east. In the end, it was pointing to—

“We don’t know!” One of the ministers of Shutora, a man sporting a long, proud-looking beard, finished his brisk report.

“What? You mean you couldn’t figure it out?” the Dark Queen muttered.

“You don’t know?” Esmeralda sighed. “I thought Shutora’s observatories were able to see with quite some detail when it came to the kingdom’s defenses.”

“Y-Yes, however, the beam of rainbow light stretched past the coastline... It appears to be pointing somewhere beyond the sea.”

“That far?!”

The sea, huh. In my long, long life, it was one of the few things I had never seen with my own eyes. I always enjoyed summer at the Holy Spring of Tritonis, that lake I had ended up making by accident when I was younger. There was a

lot of water there, but apparently the sea was even bigger! According to the picture books I read to Olivia when she was younger, it was just water, water, and more water, stretching for as far as the eye could see.

“The eastern coastline... So in the opposite direction of the Empire and the Republic?” Esmeralda asked, confused.

Olivia was caught up in thoughts of the water. She had never seen the sea either.

“Yes, that is what it appears,” the minister responded. “Perhaps there is another continent beyond the sea, or...”

Something on the other side of the sea. An unknown continent. Olivia and I shared a look. We had heard a story of something similar once. *Cindy’s Adventure* was a book that Olivia and I had taken a liking to. It was a story about going overseas to search for treasure. We couldn’t help but get excited by the idea. Our summer adventure this year had been tons of fun. We had bonded even more with all our friends and made many new ones. But the idea of an adventure in a whole new place sounded wonderful!

“Umm!”

“Please...!”

“Let us go look for them!!!” Olivia and I all but shouted in unison.

After living alone on my mountain for so long, I had never expected to get excited at the idea of something new. But after I met Olivia, my world had been steadily getting larger and larger.

“I-I-It spoke! A-A-A-As you wish.” The minister jumped in surprise, looking up at me in a panic.

Wait, looking up...?

“Oh no! Sorry, I’ll change back.” I had forgotten I was still in my dragon form. I really couldn’t help it when I got that excited!

“You will go look for yourself, Elder Dragon? I would be grateful...but will you be okay alone?”

“Hmm... That’s a good point, since after all, Sir Daddy cannot swim.”

Esmeralda and Luca stared at us.

Oh. That's right. We had had to have Luca save us when we were struggling in the water at Tritonis. This trip would be over water as far as the eye could see. It would take quite some resolve to fly all the way across it.

What if Olivia tumbled off of me and fell into the water? What if I got too hungry while flying, or couldn't find a place to rest my wings, and ended up falling? Nothing like that had happened in my entire life, but I couldn't rule it out.

"Our opponent can control the wind with magic. I do not think it is a good idea to approach from the sky in plain sight," Phyllis said. That was also true. As a dragon, I could control the wind and rain to some degree, but I wanted to avoid any unexpected situations as much as possible.

In the end, we came up with the following ideas:

First, I would travel in dragon form.

Secondly, we wouldn't fly, but we would walk there. This would supposedly show that the King's Pupil was getting along well with an elder dragon, which would also encourage the people of Shutora. *We're father and daughter though, so of course we get along!*

Finally, since we didn't know Vandilsen's goals, abilities, or even if it truly *was* him, we didn't want to stand out. If he could fly, then he would definitely notice us if we flew there. I was a lot bigger than a bird, after all.

"Ahem. Therefore...Olivia Eldraco, Elder Dragon." the young queen spoke in a dignified voice. "You two shall go camping."

"Camping?"

"Yes. Camping as you journey to the land beyond the sea to the east!"

Apparently, they had another way of getting us across the water...

Chapter 3: Mr. Dragon Sets Out on a Journey

Changing into my dragon form, I set out from the castle with Olivia on my back. Many people waved at us as we walked by. We were surrounded by cries of “They’re so cute!” and “I want a stuffed animal of those two!”

The large, dragon-sized travel bag on my back was also drawing a lot of attention. I guess it did look a little funny, but it contained all the stuff that we’d need for Olivia to live comfortably while we traveled. Inside of it was a tent, sleeping bags, and portable cooking equipment. There was also a first aid kit for emergencies, snacks, some changes of clothes for Olivia, board games to keep us entertained, and some books, like *Enjoying Camping with Your Kids* and *The Definitive Guide to Survival!* Of course I would be worried without references like those! And since we were bringing books anyway, Olivia also brought a book she wanted: the newest one Lena had written.

“Maybe this is too much luggage...” I started to worry, looking at the bulging bag again.

There were some things magic could do very well, and some things that could be done better without it. For example, we couldn’t use the *Demon’s Gate*, the powerful spell to connect two distant spaces together, to carry our things on this trip.

“Couldn’t I just use *Demon’s Gate* on the bag if it’s so big?” Olivia had suggested it before we left.

“Using the mouth of the bag as a gate, huh? That’s an idea.”

“Tee hee, we can call it the Anywhere Bag!”

“It’s even big enough for you to go inside it, so at night you could go back home and sleep in your own bed!”

She had gotten really excited at the idea.

“I know it’s you, Olivia, but that is far too dangerous!” Everyone had desperately tried to stop her. Apparently, making a magic tool with moving

coordinates like that was very dangerous or something. In fact, teleportation magic was something only extremely skilled Dark-kin could use. A single mistake could end up twisting space and splitting you right in half! Making a portable bag into a *Demon's Gate* would actually be a big deal.

“But it sounds so convenient...” Olivia had deflated.

According to Phyllis, while the young girl's skill in magic was way beyond first-class and much stronger than any ordinary human, she still didn't have much control over it.

I had a vague sense of that. Olivia's specialties were “really big spells” and “spells that affected many things.” As it turned out, when she made those cat golems to protect people from the falling debris, a lot of other things had been transformed as well...

“Hmm, I guess like father, like daughter...”

“Daddy?”

“Don't worry about it, Olivia.”

When I was young, I had made mistakes like that too, like when I'd accidentally destroyed a whole mountain, and when I created a new lake. Controlling your strength was kind of difficult.

“I guess we'll have to travel normally after all.”

Thump, thump thump, my feet went as I walked along. We were traveling by foot because we wanted to show the people that the King's Pupil got along with an elder dragon and because we weren't supposed to fly, but this was fun in its own way too.

The light showing the location of the other Hallows stretched in a straight line into the east. Our destination was the eastern coast. Every village and town we passed through had a big celebration when we arrived. The contrast between the tiny Olivia sitting on the back of a huge dragon made a big impression on them. They responded in all sorts of ways. Some were moved by the chance to see a real dragon face-to-face, and others just wanted to shake hands with my daughter.

For the first few days, we stayed overnight in the towns and villages we visited, but eventually, the time came...

“We’ll be camping here tonight!”

The sun was setting in the sky behind us. The next town was quite a ways away, and it would take far too long to go back to the village we had just passed. We would spend the next few evenings of our journey to the coast at campsites we would make.

Olivia used the Lost Origin to check which direction to go, confirming we were on the right path. The rainbow light was stronger than it had been the day before. It was likely Vandilsen (or whoever it was) could also see the light, so we didn’t want to have it on for so long.

Olivia put the Lost Origin away in our bag.

“Seven glittering lights to one star.

One star for one wish.

Grant it and shine, Shooting Star.”

Olivia sang the Shooting Star Ritual song to herself.

We set up camp next to a big river. Apparently, the trick was to pick an elevated spot in case the water suddenly rose.

“All right, let’s start setting up camp then. First, we need a fire so animals don’t bother us during the night!”

“Is your fire breath not good enough?”

“Uhh, I guess it would be fine...but let’s try and enjoy camping like humans,” I said, returning to my human form. Camping skills were typically used by traveling merchants and adventurers. But nowadays, with times as peaceful as they were, many people went out of their way to enjoy staying away from home too. After reading many books on the subject, I had to say I found the idea interesting.

“First, we need some dry wood.” Driftwood left on the banks of the river was

apparently good for campfires. We gathered firewood just as the book told us, finding some dry branches that seemed like they would catch fire easily. We then arranged some stones we found on the bank of the river to make a simple hearth.

“Good, good. Now the book says we need some flint...”

The next step was to ignite the dry branches and leaves! Humans couldn’t breathe fire, but they could still use tools to start one. I found that pretty impressive. I never would have thought of something clever like that.

Taking the flint out of our bag, I managed to get some sparks onto the dry wood, but—

“Huh?”

After burning a little bit, the fire went out.

“L-Let me try again! Get the sparks from the flint on the dry leaves... Yah!”

Boof.

Fshhhh.

“U-Uhh... Huh?”

“It’s not working, Daddy.”

“That’s weird. I’m doing it just like it says in the book...”

“Looks like it’ll be dark soon.”

“Yeah... Wait! We need to set up the tent! How am I supposed to do this?”

The sun slowly sank as I failed to get the fire going. Our first experience camping sure was proving to be a difficult one.

* * *

“F-Finally...!”

The sparks from the flint were very weak, but after finding out that dry pine needles burned very well, I was finally able to get the fire started. While I struck the flint over and over, Olivia gently blew on the sparks. When the fire caught at last and started burning steadily, Olivia and I jumped up and high-fived.

“We did it!”

“Now we can eat!”

Being a dragon, making a fire was as easy as breathing for me. Well, I guess I *could* literally breathe fire... Anyway, when cooking at home, I would just breathe a little flame to get the fire started and that was enough. And at the kitchen in Olivia’s school, they had magic tools that could easily create a flame for cooking.

“Tee hee, yay!”

Olivia smiled, unbothered by the soot on her face and dirt on her hands.

“Next is the tent!”

“Okay, hold on. Uhh, the book says...” You could make a tent with just poles, cloth, and rope. It was a convenient, portable little house you could use to sleep anywhere, but... “Oh no, it fell down!”

“Are you okay, Daddy?”

“The rope is all tangled up... What do I do now...?” If I pulled any harder, the rope and cloth would rip. It was the first time in a while that my strength as a dragon was causing problems.

“Uh, uhhh...”

Olivia blinked in surprise. We had nowhere to sleep tonight. No floor below us and no roof over our heads.

Oh no, I’m looking like the worst dad ever... What if Olivia gets disappointed?!

“Umm, why don’t we eat first?”

“G-Good idea...!”

Olivia’s consideration saved me from my predicament. It was hard to think properly when you were hungry.

* * *

I absolutely couldn’t fail at dinner, so I made something I was very familiar with.

I sliced some of the rye bread we'd brought and toasted it over the open fire. I then put some of the preserved ham and cheese between the slices. To finish the dish off, I put them over the fire a bit longer to melt the cheese. In the end, I made some nice, simple ham and cheese sandwiches for us.

"It tastes great!"

"Sorry it's the same as what we had for breakfast...and we don't even have any milk soup to go with it." Milk went bad very quickly, so it wasn't something we could carry around with us.

"Anything tastes great when we're outside and eating together."



“Olivia...”

“Like when we had that picnic with Maredia and Clowria!”

“Ah, we did do that, didn’t we?”

Olivia’s straw hat had been adorable that day. Just thinking back on it made me smile. Human cheeks really were far softer than I was used to.

“Making sandwiches back then was really fun too.”

“Yeah, it was, wasn’t it?”

“And do you remember when I had a sleepover with Daisy?”

“Uh-huh. And then you two went into the Dark Queen’s library...”

The atmosphere created by the crackling fire, wavering flames, and the smell of smoke made us want to talk much more than usual. It was quite mysterious. Though we had brought books and board games to pass the time, maybe we didn’t really need them. We just talked about our fond memories, and time slipped by in a flash.

With the moon and the stars hanging in the sky above us, and a night breeze blowing around us as we had our after-meal tea, our eyes began to droop.

“Good night, Daddy.”

“Good night, Olivia.”

In the end, we failed to set up the tent, so I slept in my dragon form with my wings spread as a shelter for Olivia. Watching her sleeping peacefully made a warm feeling well up in my chest. Thinking back, it had been quite a while since we had spent time with just the two of us. It may have even been the first time we had since Olivia started going to school.

As I began to doze off, I began to dream of days long past.

* * *

I remembered a day a short time after I first met Olivia. I was doing my best to be a good father for her, studying all kinds of books on child-rearing. A heart-rending cry filled the shrine that I called home.

“Oh no, oh no, oh no! Wh-what’s wrong?! Are you hungry? Are you sleepy?!”

Olivia was still unsteady on her feet, and couldn’t say much other than “daddy.” Sometimes she’d start crying in a loud voice, especially late at night. As she sniffled and screamed, I had no idea what I could do at all, so I just snuggled up close to her.

“...Daddy... Daddy...”

“Yeah, I’m your Daddy. Don’t scre— Er, don’t cry, Olivia.”

After I held her close in my dragon form, she would finally quiet down. I would spend the night sleeping at her side...though actually, as big as I was, if I rolled over in my sleep, she’d be squished! I was so afraid that I could barely close my eyes during those nights.

I was a dragon and I had spent my whole life living alone in the mountains, following nothing but my whims. I slept when I wanted to, and awoke when I felt like it. I ate what I wanted, and walked where I pleased. That’s just how I lived. So now, dealing with a child crying in the night, or being unable to sleep was a little...no, it was *very* difficult for me. How old was I? A few thousand years? Maybe tens of thousands? I was so old I didn’t even remember how old I was, and that had been the first time I’d ever been unable to sleep.

I was quite good at cooking these days, but back then, things hadn’t been so easy for me. There were a lot of difficulties in our daily lives back then. There were times when I felt totally lost within the maelstrom.

However, looking back now, they were all pleasant memories. And as time went on, we were piling even more fun memories on top of the old ones. I never would have thought we’d find ourselves sitting around a campfire, trading stories of happy memories like that...

“Ah!”

I suddenly snapped awake, the moon bright in the sky. There was still some time until sunrise. And Olivia was still sleeping under my wings with a peaceful look on her face.

“Gotta be careful not to wake her...”

Wiping a tear from my eye with one of my claws, I went back to sleep, only waking up again to the sound of birds singing.

* * *

Having learned our lesson, the next day we decided to start setting up camp early. To make up for the time we'd lose, we walked a bit faster during the day. Our increased pace took us about a day's trip away from the coast. Being unable to fly was inconvenient, but a journey on foot had its own merits. We could really enjoy the scenery around us while we walked.

"Daddy, I got the firewood!"

"Thank you. Look, I got the tent up!"

"Whoa, that's amazing! It looks like a witch's hat!"

"It really does, doesn't it? A pointy hat tent."

Thanks to my careful mental training during the day, I had managed to assemble the tent. Well, it *may* have taken me four tries...

"Next is the fire!"

"Yeah. We've got it this time!"

With a bit of trial and error, the two of us together managed to get the fire going. Once the large blaze calmed down to glowing embers, we started cooking. Today we used some of our dried meat to make a soup. I also added some of the edible herbs that Olivia had found while we were traveling.

"It tastes really wild, doesn't it?"

"We don't get these plants around our mountain... They have quite a punch!"

The flavor of the dried meat permeated throughout the soup and added just enough saltiness to the broth. The herbs Olivia had picked matched the flavor perfectly. Finally, the potatoes we added made it quite filling.

"But I really have to give it to Kate. It tastes better than any dried meat I've ever had."

"Yeah! When I get older, I hope I can be as good a cook as she is."

"I'm sure you will."

I threw more wood on the fire. The strange log I added gave off a refreshing smell as it started to burn.

“Wow, that’s a really nice smell!”

“Is this one of those fragrant woods I heard about?” I had read that trees like that grew closer to the east coast. “At this rate, we’ll reach the sea before noon tomorrow.”

“The sea, huh? It’s bigger than Tritonis, right?” Olivia asked.

“That’s what I’ve heard.”

“Have you never seen it before, Daddy?”

“No, I haven’t.”

Olivia gave a strangely satisfied laugh. “So there *are* some new things for you too!”

“Yep, that’s right.”

You might not remember them, but I’ve had plenty of new experiences.

* * *

Three days had passed since we left the last town. We’d tried all sorts of new experiences, like fishing and open-air bathing, and we’d enjoyed ourselves to the point of forgetting about the Hallows altogether! Truth be told, I think I was acting a bit too childish for my age...okay, *far* too childish for my age. Even Olivia had started to notice.

It was really embarrassing, but I had a good excuse. It was really, really fun! The weather was great, and even when the rain took us by surprise, I was having a wonderful time just being with Olivia.

As we trudged along on a path covered in dry sand that afternoon, a salty wind blew past us. I had never felt a breeze like that before. The air was a little bit different depending on where you were at the time. High up in the sky, the wind was cold and biting. Then there was the rich, humid air that blew through the forest. And there was also wind heavy with the scents of human life that

blew past us as Olivia and I walked through the towns. The air in all these locations was unique. Was this new scent what the sea smelled like? It wasn't just salty, but it seemed to smell like *life*. It was totally different from the air on land.

The land as we neared the sea was totally different from the soft, moist earth of the mountains as well. Even the sensation of the earth beneath my feet was pleasantly new.

"Ah, Daddy! Look!" Olivia shouted. Of course, I could see it too. A blue horizon stretched out left and right before us. A glittering surface that seemed to go on forever.

"Wh-Whoa...!"

"That's amazing. It looks like a sea of jewels!"

"It really does!"

For a while, we stood entranced by the beauty of the water.

And then it finally occurred to me:

"We have to cross *this*?"

"Wh-What if we sink?"

That's right—Olivia and I were both utterly terrible at swimming. Our first experiences trying resulted in us almost drowning in swimming class. We had progressed a bit, but only to the point of being a bit more comfortable with water on our faces thanks to Luca's help.

"That's a problem... Hmm..."

"Hmm..."

I could fly, but the water looked like it stretched on forever. The possibility of me dozing off and falling from the sky sent a shiver down my back.

"Miss Esmeralda said they would get a boat ready for us..." We couldn't see anything like that anywhere though. I jogged up to the edge of the water. The waves hitting the shore before flowing back out into the sea were interesting to watch.

“Ah!” Olivia shouted again. I looked to where she was pointing.

“A-A-A kid?!”

“It’s a boy!” A child was lying on the beach as if he had been thrown there by the waves.

Oh no!!!

“Are you okay?!” Olivia hurried to his side and lifted his head up.

“Whoa, he’s covered in sand!” The boy was soaked from head to toe, with sand stuck to him all over. The only thing we could really tell about him was that his hair was a shining silver color, and his complexion was awful. He looked like he was in really bad shape.

Olivia tried using the healing magic she had learned at school on him.

“He’s not moving...”

“No way, is he...d-dead?”

“Ugh...”

“Ah, he’s alive!”

Healing magic simply amplified a person’s own energy. If they didn’t have any to start with, it wouldn’t do anything for them.

“Is he sick? What do we do?” I was totally lost.

“I know!” Olivia started searching through her bag. “Here, the plant-acea!” It was a medicinal plant that could cure any ailment. It grew all over our mountain, but when we brought some of it from our garden to school, it had caused a big fuss. Though it had just been a simple summer project, Olivia had ended up receiving an honorary doctorate in herbology because of it.

Putting some of the herb in his mouth, she used her hands to make him chew it.

Olivia, aren’t you being a bit rough with him...?

“Uh...?” The boy’s eyes snapped open. “D-d-dragon?!” he shouted, eyes wide. He looked to be about the same age as Olivia.

“Oh, sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you.” I had forgotten to go back into my human form. His voice seemed a lot more childlike than I had imagined. He sounded really happy. Maybe he liked dragons?

“Dragons, still alive!”

“Uhh, are you okay? Can you tell us your name?” Olivia asked.

“Huh...? Human...?”

“What’s your name? I’m Olivia.”

“Name...” The boy sank into thought.

Did he not remember? I was starting to worry.

Is he suffering from amnesia...?

“Ah!!!”

“Daddy, what’s wrong?”

“N-N-N-Nothing at all, Olivia.” I tried to feign calmness. A situation involving a boy with amnesia and a girl who rescued him. From the books Olivia read all the time, there was a high chance of...*that* happening. That thing that happened between humans.

“L... L... L...”

“What’s wrong, Daddy? Are you imitating something?”

“Ahem! No, sorry.”

Love! No, that was unacceptable. *There’s no way she’ll fall in l-l-love with this boy.*

“My name. Shadow.”



The boy was covered in sweat but finally whispered his name. I was relieved, smiling as wide as a dragon could.

“Th-Thank goodness!”

Phew! It wasn't amnesia. That made the chances of *that* happening much lower.

* * *

At the same time, at Shutora castle...

“Haugh... What is with this situation?” The Dark Queen Maredia looked down from the wall around Shutora Castle into the open square. Beside her was Clowria, holding a pot of tea, with a wry smile.

There were two reasons they had picked such a strange spot for their tea time. First, Maredia thought it would make her look stronger if she took her tea in a high place. Second, she wanted to avoid places with a lot of people. So they had just ended up here.

“Yes, well... A human's life cycle is rather short, so there are likely none left who experienced the previous war.”

“You mean our huge battle?”

“Yes, Your Darkness. I looked into it a little, and it seems the Human Realm...or more specifically, the Kingdom of Shutora, has been largely peaceful since then. There has been little more than small internal squabbles in all this time.”

“Aha. So *that's* why the descendants of the heroes who sealed me away are still so full of themselves. I get it.” Maredia gave a big yawn. Despite her appearance as a young girl, she was a Dark-kin that had lived for over fifteen hundred years. Five hundred of those years had been spent as the dignified commander of an army, since she had been deemed the “child of prophecy destined to unite the Human and Dark Realms.”

“Peace has dulled them quite a bit, hasn't it?”

“So it appears, my beauteous queen,” Clowria nodded at her side. To the two of them, the humans below them in the square, with no experience of real war,

seemed hopelessly naive.

“All the more reason for you to go take command, Marie.”

“Haugh, Luca!”

“My liege?!”

With a big smile, Luca grabbed Maredia by the collar and leaped down to the square below. Using the water magic she was so skilled at, Luca made the liquid from the bottle she was holding come out and form platforms for them, allowing them to jump down to the ground without issue.

As they landed in the center of the square, the soldiers all turned to watch them. They were members of the army and volunteers that had gathered to protect the capital after the loss of the Hallows. Phyllis’s protective light magic that required the Gem-Stave of Eternity had secretly kept the kingdom safe all these years, but now that it was lost, this was their first time protecting the kingdom with pure manpower. They all seemed uneasy, but they were determined to protect their way of life.

“Ahhh...” Maredia had been a shut-in for a thousand years, but she wasn’t *that* Maredia anymore. On her left hand, she wore the ring Olivia had bought for her, which was half of a matching pair with the ring Clowria had.

Maredia took a deep breath.

“Everyone! Do not be so flustered!”

The soldiers all froze at her words.

“I can’t accept any of you! Do you think you can protect the capital with willpower alone?!”

“Th-The Dark-kin...?”

“Have you designated regiments and shifts yet?! Managing those is important! From there, you’ll need to secure your supply lines!!!”

“Wh-What is going on?!”

Maredia energetically began giving out instructions, a stark contrast to her usual self. Her unusual charisma started to steadily improve the troops’ morale.

Esmeralda watched her from the sidelines with a playful sigh.

“Listen! We will protect the peace of this city!!! A-Augh!” In the middle of her grand performance, Maredia tripped and fell. The soldiers all shared surprised looks.

“We gotta be careful...” those watching said to themselves. For a brief moment, they had caught a glimpse of the glue that had kept the Dark-kin army together. She was a useless commander that they couldn’t bear to hate, which made her unexpectedly beloved.

* * *

A messenger owl from the capital arrived. Apparently, the fleet of ships would arrive here on the eastern coast tomorrow.

Though we put them together rather hastily, they should provide a nice voyage for you. Please enjoy yourselves.

So it had said. In addition, there was a second note saying:

The queen would love to take a ride on the back of a dragon, so once everything is concluded, I hope you can help.

Daisy’s father had been like that too. I wondered what made humans want to ride on my back so much. Though honestly, I was more than happy to oblige Olivia whenever she begged to ride on my shoulders, so...

“Okay, let’s write a reply!”

Olivia and I are doing well.

So far, so good.

We will set up camp and wait for tomorrow, so everything should be fine. There is a cave nearby we can hide in if there is a sudden storm.

That finished up our note back. I had to admit that the idea of staying in a cave was somewhat nostalgic for me.

“Hey, Shadow, are you hungry?”

“Hun...gry?”

“Yeah. We don’t have a whole lot of food left, but...”

“Uhh... Olivia?!”

Olivia worried over the silver-haired boy, Shadow. Meanwhile, I was being assaulted by a feeling that was hard to describe.

H-H-He's getting closer...to Olivia...!

Maybe that was the feeling of not wanting to give my daughter away. Shadow was in quite a bit of trouble, so we had to help him. I understood that. But, *but*, my dragon heart was going crazy! Without even thinking first, my rampaging feelings brought me back into my dragon form. I could only really maintain my human form when I was in a calm state of mind.

“Ohh... Dragon... Ancient, real, dragon...” Shadow’s eyes were sparkling. He really did seem to like dragons a lot.

“Whoa, Daddy?! Are you trying to make him feel better?”

“Huh? Ah, uhh... Ha ha, maybe, I guess...” I just couldn’t say it. I couldn’t tell her that I was unhappy with him being here when she was so worried about him!

“Amazing... There are still...real dragons...” Shadow still stared up at me in adoration, so I decided to leave it at that. *Sorry, Shadow.*

“Would you like some bread?” Olivia offered.

“Don’t eat, bread... Eat life.”

“Life...?”

Shadow collapsed into a fit of ragged coughs.

“Oh no, are you okay? Let me heal you... Huh?”

His breathing labored as his fit continued. The magic she was using didn’t seem to be having any effect. His continued coughing seemed extremely painful, almost like he was choking. It seemed his body wasn’t all that strong. Maybe the plant-acea worked because it was a plant, and so was technically alive?

“Bread is made from wheat...but maybe it’s no good if it’s processed?” It was hard to tell what Shadow wanted since he couldn’t speak very well, but I had

experienced that before while raising Olivia. There had been a time she couldn't talk properly either.

"Okay, Shadow."

"...What, dragon?"

"Let's try fishing! Can you eat fish?"

"Fish are...life..."

It seemed like that would work. I wanted to say it wasn't good to be so picky about your food, but for now, our priority was getting him something he could eat.

"Okay, leave it to me!" I tied a length of the string from our travel sewing kit to my tail. There was a hook in the kit as well, so I used that. From what I had read in the books, we'd also need some kind of weight. And bait... I wondered if bread crumbs would work? With all of these items added, the improvised fishing line was complete.

"Hi-yah!" I threw the line out into the sea.

"Whoa! Are you using that to go fishing, Daddy?"

"Yes! This time I'll get it for sure!" I answered with confidence. We had tried fishing a few times already, but we had never caught anything. But this time it would definitely work, I was sure of it. The sea was so clear we could see the fish swimming in it. And if any of them bit, I'd definitely be able to pull them in. My tail was really strong. "Just wait a bit, you two. I'll catch you some delicious fish!"

* * *

A few hours passed.

"No good..."

I couldn't catch anything. I was really disappointed.

"Uhh, hmm... There's something else I saw in a textbook once."

"Olivia?"

Olivia reached her hand out and stuck it into the water as she stared at the

shadows of fish swimming around. *Something in a textbook? What did she read?*

“A spell that can catch a lot of fish!”

“Uh...”

“*Thunder Bolt!*” With a crackling sound, a massive lightning bolt shot out from Olivia’s hand. And then...

“Th... Th-The fish...!” The fish all started floating belly-up to the surface. One, two, three, four...there sure were a lot of them.

“Olivia?!”

“Wow, violent...”

“Tee hee...”

“Uhh, let’s just take what we need for today. Olivia, can you help the others?”

“Okay! *Heal!*” The healing light returned the fish back to normal. Thank goodness.

Later, I came to find out that fishing like this was illegal among humans. *I’ll have to remember to tell Olivia that someday.*

* * *

His heart raced so loudly it was annoying. He had been right here. *Where did the boy go?!* That boy was more precious than life itself and kinder than anyone else. If it were for the sake of that child, he would grant any wish, no matter how crazy it was.

Vandilsen tore at his hair in a panic. His hair was jet black, the total opposite of that boy’s. He knew he was just a human, and nothing more. Long ago, when he had still been young, he had called himself the Black-haired Dark-kin, the memory of which made him even more flustered. Even after thousands of years, he couldn’t forget the lighthearted jabs he had gotten for that at the time.

But that aside... His biggest issue right now was the empty bed in front of him. He had finally acquired six of the Seven Supreme Hallows. He would finally be

able to grant that boy's wish...but that beloved child's silver hair and dark skin were nowhere to be seen.

“Where did you go, Shadow?!” The ancient sage stomped in frustration within his castle on the barren continent.

Chapter 4: Mr. Dragon Sets Up Camp

It was evening, and the setting sun cooled the air around us. We were warmed up by our crackling campfire. We had gotten quite used to starting fires and cooking with them. Today, we'd be making salt-grilled fish. After giving our thanks to the fat, round fish, we skewered them and seasoned the outside with salt. We then stood the skewers close to the fire so they'd cook slowly. The skin would get nice and crispy while the meat stayed fluffy and soft. The salt really added an exquisite flavor.

Now back in my human form, I sat next to Olivia and Shadow. The three of us enjoyed our dinner together.

"Here you go, Shadow."

"Err..."

"It's okay. Try it!"

Shadow hesitantly took the skewer Olivia offered him. Taking a tiny nibble, his eyes shot open.

"Delicious!"

"Great! Is this what you meant by 'life'?" I asked about the mysterious thing he had said earlier, but he didn't answer. Olivia's friend Lena was the same in that she didn't speak very much, but she had the outlet of writing her stories to communicate. Shadow seemed like he'd be more of a challenge to get along with.

"Are you lost?" Olivia asked.

"Yeah..."

"Oh, did you run away from home? I heard one of my friends did that before!"

"Ran away?! I'm sure your family is very worried about you, then..." If Olivia disappeared from our home one day... Even thinking about it gave me the

shivers.

“Run away...” Shadow repeated.

“Oh, if you don’t want to talk about it, you don’t have to.”

“And, you?” he asked us.

“We’re searching for some jewels called the Seven Supreme Hallows,” Olivia answered. “A thief came and stole them all.”

“...Oh. Take, back?”

“That’s the plan.”

The Seven Supreme Hallows had the power to grant any wish. It would be a big problem if someone used them for a bad reason.

“.....I see.” It was hard to tell from his response whether he was interested in the story or not. He then began coughing violently again, and we moved him around the fire so he could avoid the smoke. I returned to my dragon form and used my wings to blow it away.

Olivia pulled out the Lost Origin and asked where the other Hallows were, a daily ritual to make sure we were still on the right path. We figured sunset was the time of day that the beam of light it created would be least noticeable. For a brief instant, a beam of rainbow-colored light shot out across the sea.

“By the way, where is your home, Shadow?” Being in my dragon form, I tried to speak with as much dignity as I could manage. Shadow seemed to really respect me for some reason, so I was hoping he would answer.

“...There.”

“Huh?”

“There.”

He pointed across the sea, in the same direction as the beam of light. But I had heard there was nothing on the other side of the sea but a continent that had turned into a wasteland. What was going on?

Shadow stared up at my confused face. “Sleep,” he said before coughing again.

“Uh...yeah, right. Have a good night.” Tomorrow, the fleet of ships that the queen had sent for us would arrive. But what were we supposed to do with this mysterious boy?

* * *

“Wow, I didn’t expect it to rain so suddenly!”

“Good thing we didn’t get soaked,” Olivia said.

“Yeah. Are you okay, Shadow?”

Just as we were starting to get ready for bed, an unexpected rainstorm drove us into a nearby cave. It would have been a disaster if it had started raining after we’d fallen asleep. I knew that if they didn’t change out of their wet clothes they’d catch a cold, but the idea of Olivia and Shadow changing at the same time bothered me for some reason.

“A campfire would be dangerous in here, so let’s hold off on that.”

“Okay. I’m warm enough sticking close to you anyway, Daddy.”

“Really? Dragons are cold-blooded, you know.”

Shadow stayed silent as Olivia and I talked. Maybe he was just tired. Some human children got really quiet when they were exhausted.

Outside the cave, the sound of the rain was getting louder and louder. The sound of waves hitting the shore was getting more intense as well. There was no sign of seawater making it into the cave, so we didn’t have to worry about getting wet here. The heavy rain was a bit concerning, but it was just as capable of lulling us to sleep. Long, long ago, I slept through such a long rainy season that I woke up covered in moss. Apparently, people had thought I was a hill of some sort.

“Do you think you can sleep here, Shadow?”

“...Mm.” Staring at the rain outside the mouth of the cave, Shadow nodded.

Silver hair and dark skin. I had noticed that his eyes had a faint red color to them as well. They reminded me of Olivia’s precious brooch. She had chosen the ruby it was made of because it made her think of my eyes.

W-Wait, actually, my hair is silver too...

Though I hadn't thought about it much, I remembered that when I was in my human form, my hair was silvery-white. I started to wonder if Shadow's situation was more complicated than I had thought.

"Good night, Daddy," Olivia said with a big yawn.

"Yeah, good night for real this time."

Once I heard Olivia's even, sleeping breaths, I soon followed suit.

* * *

Hungry, hungry. Hungry.

I opened my eyes, absolutely starving. There was an ancient survivor of the dragons and a small human child with me. They were really kind, protecting me without a hint of doubt.

I coughed. My chest felt itchy. I breathed slowly and carefully until my breathing calmed down so that I wouldn't wake them up. It was a habit I had grown accustomed to. If I coughed too loudly, my dad...that really kind, but really silly Vandilsen...would get worried.

No, maybe *I* was the silly one. I was born weak and useless, but he still took care of me. My wish to live together with him forever was a mistake from the start. After all, while Dad was a powerful wizard, he was only human. And I...

Hungry... So hungry...

I slowly stood up. It was raining heavily outside. The large waves might have thrown a fish onto the shore.

Hungry.

I wanted to eat *life*. The fluffy, salty, piping hot salt-grilled fish had been warm and delicious. It had been the first time in ages I had eaten with someone other than my dad. But they hadn't been nearly enough.

"...There."

A still-living fish was lying near the entrance of the cave. The strong winds and large waves must have thrown it there. I sank my teeth right into it. With a snapping sound, the fish's life was extinguished. As I bit into its insides, its raw, fishy flavor filled my mouth. Even though it was the same kind of fish we had eaten before, it tasted totally different now.

As weak and useless as I was, I couldn't survive without eating living things. All animals needed to eat some other form of life to survive, but I needed a lot, and it needed to be as fresh as I could get it.

In mere moments, the fish had been reduced to nothing but bones. I finished up by eating the head, and then wiped the blood around my mouth on my sleeve. Dad had probably noticed I was missing and was surely panicking now. He may have been sad or angry. I had run away from the castle where just the two of us lived and thrown myself into the sea. I had never expected I'd survive and reach land on the other side.

But I'd had no other choice. I couldn't stand Dad doing any more crazy things because of me. I knew what he was trying to do by gathering the Seven Supreme Hallows, those super powerful jewels. That had been the only thing he'd been working on for ages. Even though he was just a human, he was trying to grant my wish so that he could live with me forever.

"An ancient dragon... Maybe he could stop Dad?"

My dad was really strong. If it was for my sake, he'd do anything, but that was no good. There were some lines that should never be crossed. And what he was doing now— It was extremely lucky I was able to meet these two here. It was possible that a dragon that had lived so long would be able to stop him. After taking the lives of a few more fish, I went back to the cave and lay down.

They seemed so happy sleeping side by side. I decided I would try relying on them.

* * *

Every morning, we always made sure to do our exercises. Olivia had grown up strong and healthy, but I think that was in part thanks to a bit of effort on my part. A lack of physical activity was bad for a child's development, so I made sure we never missed our morning exercises.

“Good morning. Time to wake up, Olivia.”

“Mmm... Good morning, Daddy...” Olivia greeted me with a yawn and a smile. She then stood up and we started our usual routine.

Clear morning light shone through the entrance to the cave.

Yeah, it's been a while. What a nostalgic feeling.

Back when I slept in my shrine, I'd found the morning light to be irritating and too bright. I'd usually just complain about it interrupting my sleep. But ever since moving into the Dark Queen's castle, I've always been excited to see the sun each and every day. After all, the morning sun meant that Olivia would wake up soon, and *that* meant I'd get to hear another “good morning, Daddy!” from her.

Life really was good. I was so happy that Olivia was enjoying her school life, but in the end, I loved experiencing every bright new morning alone with my daughter! This was just a pet theory of mine, but I felt like the morning sun shone because of Olivia's smile, and the morning dew glittered because she was having fun. The world was really a beautiful place.

Once we were finished with our morning routine, Olivia cocked her head to the side and looked confused.

“Huh?”

“What's wrong?”

“I feel like I'm forgetting something... Oh! Shadow!”

“Oh!!!”

Oh no! Olivia and I were both the type to wake up with totally empty heads. We hadn't seen Shadow in the cave at all. *Where did he go?* We had found him yesterday when he was lost, so we were responsible for taking him somewhere safe.

“Shadow!”

“Hey, Shadow!”

We hurried outside of the cave. The heavy rain from last night had been

replaced by the brilliant light of the morning. Looking around, I quickly caught a glimpse of silver hair and dark brown skin. It was Shadow! He had gone walking off without telling anyone. On the one hand, I was relieved to see he was okay, but I was also a bit irritated.

“What are you doing, Shadow? You’re making your uncle worried...”

“Uncle?” Olivia asked. “Are you an uncle now, Daddy?”

“Err, no, not at all!” *Wow. I can’t believe I just naturally called myself his uncle!* At my age, I was way closer to being his grandfather or something. I was a dragon, after all.

“.....Breakfast.”

“Huh?”

“Breakfast. Picked these up. To eat...” Shadow was holding a bag he had found somewhere, its contents rattling in his hands.

“Oh, clams!” Olivia exclaimed.

The bag was full of clams. They looked like the same type that we had eaten in restaurants before, though there weren’t quite enough of them for the three of us.

“Wow, clams... That’s amazing! How did you find them?”

“Dug. In the sand.”

“Wait, they were just lying around?!” Seriously? Apparently, you could find them just lying around on the beach, like fruit on the mountain.

“Dig through the sand... Like this.”

“Whoa!”

As Shadow started to make a hole in the sand with his hands, clams started to pop out. Olivia watched in amazement. Actually, I was pretty thrilled too. I was really enjoying this adventure, what with all the new things I was learning.

“Ancient dragon, didn’t know?”

“Ah ha ha... I mostly live in the mountains.”

“Huh...”

“Probably for even longer than you realize. Before I met Olivia, I didn’t know very much about this world at all.”

“...Oh.” With that, he went back to quietly digging up clams. Olivia began copying him, trying to dig up some of her own.

“Hey Daddy, did you know that this is called ‘clamming’?”

“Clamping, huh?”

“Tee hee, no, not clamping. *Clamming!*”

“Claiming?”

“No! Clamp— Wait...”

I timidly approached the sea myself. The waves washing over my small human feet tickled. With the cold seawater flowing around me and the sun shining brightly overhead as it slowly climbed higher in the sky, I couldn’t help but smile.

Once we filled Shadow’s bag, we started to make breakfast. Adding the shellfish to our usual soup would add a great flavor to it.

“But, first... Have to get the sand out.” Shadow instructed us on how to prepare the clams.

“Get the sand out?”

“Yes, too sandy. Like this... Only good to flavor soup...”

“Hmm... Is that so...”

“That flavor, really good...”

I stared at the shellfish that we had dug out of the sand. They were sitting in a little pool of seawater. If we didn’t get the sand out of them, we couldn’t eat them.

“It would be nice if they spit it out for us right away.”

“I wanted to try eating them too...” Olivia said.

Suddenly, the clams started spitting out sand all at once.

“Whoa!”

“Oh, s-sorry. I didn’t mean it like that, little clams!”

“Too much pressure...maybe?” Shadow seemed taken aback by the scene.

Being a dragon, this kind of stuff happened to me from time to time. I’d say to myself, “I wish there was some tasty fruit for me to snack on,” and then suddenly the trees around the mountain would start growing fruit right away. They were probably trying to answer my request. I was happy they tried to help, but it made them kind of hard to eat...

“You know a lot about the sea, don’t you Shadow? We don’t know anything at all, so it really helps to have you around.”

“The person who raised me...loved the sea. He was born...near there.”

The one who raised him...

Apparently he had someone to rely on as well. We definitely had to make sure he got back to them.

“Taught me, how to play at the beach... After seeing, dragon and Olivia, remembered...” Shadow turned away. It looked like it was a subject he wasn’t too keen to talk about.

Olivia gave him a big smile. “I’m really excited to try this breakfast!”

“Yeah...”

“Do you want to help make the soup?” I offered. “Our ship should be here soon, so you can come with us. Your home is across the sea, right?”

For a moment, I thought I saw him grimace, but it was replaced quickly with a silent nod.

* * *

The soup we made using the clams we’d collected was delicious. They added a natural saltiness to the soup that was quite different from the flavors found on our mountain.

“No sand at all... Impossible...” Shadow muttered, rubbing his stomach.

“Yeah... I really need to be careful with my words.”

“Ancient dragons, totally different... Normally, they won’t spit out sand when asked.”

“Th-They were really tasty, huh?”

“They really were!” Olivia said.

“If you only live in mountains... Maybe not used to animals that live in the sea...”

As the three of us watched the water, we saw a boat start to come in from the distance. It was a large ship with the emblem of the Kingdom of Shutora on it.

“Heeeey, Olivia! Elder Dragon!!!” The Dark Queen waved at us. The ship was carrying a lot of people. “Everyone, to starboard! Our target is Olivia and the Elder Dragon!”

“Aye, ma’am!”

“Make sure you don’t run aground!”

“Aye aye, ma’am!”

The people steering the ship responded energetically to the Dark Queen’s orders. They were all wearing hats that had horns made to look exactly like hers. What was that all about?

“Whoa, the Dark Queen is super popular!”

“That’s amazing. Miss Maredia looks just like a pirate from one of our books!”

“Dark...Queen?”

“Yeah, she’s the Dark Queen.”

“Ancient dragon, friends with a Dark Queen?”

“Of course we’re friends. We live together!”

“Yeah! She’s an important member of our family!”

“Family...” Shadow echoed.

The ship made its way toward us. It was quite large.

So that’s how we’re getting across the water...?

“It looks so small compared to the sea though... Will we really be okay?” I couldn’t help but shiver at the thought.

* * *

“Miss Maredia!”

“Olivia! It’s been so long, I missed you so much! Allow me to introduce my new crew to you!”

The deck of the ship was in a great uproar. Men and women were running around in every which way, full of energy.

“Long live Lady Maredia!”

“We’ll make sure you keep you safe!”

“To the ruined continent in the east!!!”

“I’ve never had a captain like this before! We can’t trust her to be left alone!”

“You’ve got us, so you’ll be safe now!”

Clowria watched quietly from the side. What on earth had happened while we were camping?

“Oh my... I never imagined the charm of my beautiful Queen Maredia would be recognized by so many people...” For some reason or other, Clowria seemed rather satisfied. On her arm was a band that said “Marie Fanclub: Honorary President.” That made me stop and think for a moment.

“Maybe I could be the honorary president of an Olivia fan club...”

“Oh my, but she already has a fan club at the academy,” Clowria informed me.

“What?”

“Twelve, in fact.”

“Twelve clubs?! Without me even knowing?!”

That just wouldn’t do. Once we got back to the Academy, I’d have to join them all!

“Oh, Elder Dragon. Who is this...?” Clowria asked, seeing the silent boy hiding

behind me.

“His name is Shadow. It looks like he got lost.”

“Oh, how unfortunate.”

“We found him washed up on the beach.”

“So...he’s more of a castaway, then?”

“Huh? Castaway?” In Olivia’s room at home was a book called *Tale of the Sixteen Castaways*. It was a pretty popular book. I had thought a “castaway” was something like an adventurer, but maybe not?

“Greetings, Sir Shadow. My name is Clowria.”

The Dark Queen came up behind Clowria, clearly in high spirits. Her current energetic mood was so different from that of the shut-in Dark Queen we were so used to that it was hard to believe she was the same person. Apparently deep down she was someone who was really at home in a crowd.

“Oh? Who’s this? What a fine-looking boy you’ve picked up! I am Maredia, the captain of this ship!”

“My Queen, I believe you are overdoing it a bit.”

“Haugh...”

“But that is just another wonderful thing about you.”

“Hah! Of course! I’m well aware of that!”

“You...Dark-kin? Dark Queen, Dark-kin, human, dragon... Family?” Shadow stared at the two Dark-kin in disbelief.

“That’s right, we all live together.”

“Hmm...”

“What is your family like, Shadow?”

Shadow didn’t say anything.

“Haugh... Silver hair, huh? You must have quite a bit of magical power.”

“I must also admit to being curious about that,” Clowria added. “The boy does not appear to be a Dark-kin like us...”

“Don’t...worry.” Shadow looked away.

“Shadow lives across the sea. Do you mind if he comes with us?”

“Haugh? You do realize that searching for the one who stole the Hallows will be quite dangerous, yes?”

“Tee hee, please let him come with us, Captain Maredia!”

“Ah! C-Captain!” The Dark Queen crossed her arms, flustered by Olivia’s request. Olivia was quite good at pestering people to get what she wanted, so I imagined it wouldn’t be too long before the Dark Queen caved.

Chapter 5: Mr. Dragon Boards a Ship

“All right, full speed ahead!”

“Aye aye, ma’am!”

At the Dark Queen’s command, the ship began to move.

“Listen well, Shadow. While aboard my ship, you will refer to me as Captain Maredia. Understand?”

“Why...?”

“Just say it.”

“.....Aye, ma’am, Captain Maredia.”

“Whoa, you really hate that, don’t you?”

“Leaving. Good luck, Captain.”

The Dark Queen seemed to be concerned about Shadow for some reason or other, as she seemed to be frequently calling out to him. Apparently, she was curious about his appearance, as whenever she saw him she’d stop with a confused “haugh?”

Clowria watched all this from the sidelines with a smile as she talked with Olivia. “This is a very classic-style sailing ship. It is a refreshing experience to sail on a vessel lacking Dark-kin technology.”

“Wow! This ship is amazing, Daddy!”

“I’m glad you’re having fun, Olivia.”

“Wow... Amazing...” The ship cut across the waters of the open sea. It was the first time we had ever traveled by boat. It was made of wood that was bound together so it would float on the water.

If I turned into a dragon now, would the boat sink...? Even the thought made me feel sick to my stomach.

“Ugh...”

“D-Daddy?! Are you okay?”

“Thank you, Olivia. I’m fine...”

“You look so pale.”

“Really? Even though I’m in my human form?”

“Yeah, you’re all white.”

“Huh...”

“Are you seasick?”

Seasick. I felt like I might have seen that term in one of the books I read long ago, maybe in *Traveling with Your Child: Going Anywhere Together*. There were no seas or rivers near us, so I hadn’t thought it mattered much...and actually, I had taken the fact that we could fly anywhere we needed to go for granted. Raising a child really brings you to all sorts of new places. I never imagined I’d travel anywhere by boat.

As I groaned, Olivia started teaching me how to handle it. “If you get motion sickness, you should look somewhere far away and sing in a loud voice.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. And you should have someone rub your back.” As she spoke, her tiny hands started rubbing my back up and down. That actually did feel really good.

“Guh...”

Or...maybe not. I suddenly felt really, *really* bad. Even putting aside the thoughts of the boat sinking, the ground moving under my feet was making me feel sick. This was too much for me.

“Daddy?!”

“I-I-I’m okay... I just need to sit down...”

The ship headed east, traveling under a bright, beautiful blue sky. Despite the bright and clear scenery, my stomach was in terrible shape. It was the first time I had ever been conscious of my internal organs. But I couldn’t act lame in front of Olivia. I was her Daddy, after all! I took a deep breath and sat down on the deck of the ship, watching the distant land fade away behind us. That made me

feel a little better.

“Man... Human bodies really are fragile, aren’t they?” Of course, I was just emulating a human’s body right now. Even in this form, I could crush rocks with my pinky finger or knock over a house or two by stubbing my toe. But still, this body was much more fragile than my dragon one. The small people...elves, dwarves, and Dark-kin, they were all the same.

“Or maybe I’m just way healthier than normal.”

I was a dragon. I had been the same forever and ever, and that would never change. I had never thought of anything like this before, but it was starting to make me feel a sad sense of isolation. Actually...it must be really tough for Vandilsen too. I never would have guessed he would still be alive after all this time. I had guessed that human bodies weren’t built to last very long. They were made to live short, brilliant, vivid lives.

“Guh... Bleh...”

“Hm?” I was distracted from my sickness by the sudden sound of coughing. “Shadow?!”

The violent fit was coming from Shadow, but I couldn’t see him anywhere. “Huh? I can hear him though... Shadow? Shadow, where are you?”

“S-Stay away...” His voice broke off into another coughing fit.

“Hmm?” I looked around, confused. Olivia and the others were coming over to where I had sat down.

“What is wrong, Elder Dragon?”

“It’s Shadow...”

“Hm? He was making fun of me just a little ago, was he not?”

“But now he’s coughing.”

“Oh, he is. But where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Oh my. That is an issue...”

Meanwhile, the painful coughing fit continued. After searching everywhere, I

peeked between some barrels lined up on the deck, even though it seemed that there would be no room for him there at all.

“Huh?”

“I hate...boats...”

“Wh-Whoa!”

There was something curled up in pain between the barrels.

“A lizard!”

“No...”

“It talked... Daddy, that’s Shadow!”

“Haugh, that is clearly a liza—”

“No. *Dragon...*” His voice was cut off by another fit of coughing.

It was a tiny dragon, smaller even than my tiny form that Olivia carried around the academy sometimes. He was so small and frail, like he had been starving.

“*That’s* Shadow?”

The ship continued sailing forward. I was so shocked that I forgot about my seasickness completely. After all, I couldn’t even remember the last time I had met another dragon.

* * *

“Wh-What do we do...?” Holding Shadow’s little white dragon form in my arms, I was totally flustered. He was so small and weak that I could carry him with no problem. He was always coughing so painfully. I had been thoroughly scared when Olivia caught a cold once, but seeing another child sick like this was unbearable in its own way.

“Whoa, it really *is* a dragon...”

“Daddy, my healing magic isn’t helping...”

“Maybe he’s hungry?” When we first met him, he’d seemed much better after he had eaten some fish. This morning we had enjoyed soup made with clams, but the main course had been rye bread. It was possible he couldn’t get

any nutrients from bread.

“He said something about ‘life’ before, right?” Maybe the clams weren’t enough? He had eaten quite a lot of fish yesterday.

My thoughts started to race. When Olivia was sick and wasn’t getting any better, what did I do...?

“Oh.”

“Haugh? What is it, Elder Dragon?”

“Uhh... Would you all mind leaving us alone for a minute?”

“What’s wrong, Daddy?”

“I want to ask Shadow something.”

Though confused, Olivia and the others gave us some space. I then leaned in close to him.

“Hey, Shadow.”

“Ugh... Dragon?”

“You’re a dragon too, right? But more importantly...” I lowered my voice so no one else could hear. “Did you...throw up?”

He had probably been hiding near the edge of the ship’s deck because he was seasick like I was. He likely felt so bad that he’d ended up throwing up, and must’ve been hiding behind the barrels because he didn’t want anyone to see him. Olivia hadn’t wanted me to watch her while she was sick either. Actually, I was still feeling rather nauseous myself.

O-Oh no. I shouldn’t think about being sick. Don’t think about the floor swaying under your feet. Keep it together! You’re a dragon, after all.

“Ugh...”

“You...okay?”

“I’m fine. If you were feeling so sick that you threw up, you should have told us.”

“Sorry...”

“No need to apologize. Let’s go get you some fish.”

“But...if I eat...I’ll throw up again...”

“Hmm...I see, the swaying is too much, isn’t it?”

“Yes...maybe dragons...weak to shaking...”

“Yeah, that might be true...”

This was quite the predicament. The wind and waves were constantly causing the boat to sway. If only I could fly, I could ignore the violent waves all around us...

“Oh.”

“What, dragon?”

“M-Miss Clowria! Umm, there’s someone else I think we have to bring along!”

“Huh? Me?”

“Miss Dark Queen! Do you think we can take a quick detour to the Holy Spring of Tritonis?”

“Haugh, no way, no way! That’s in the complete opposite direction!”

“Please...?”

If we could pick *him* up, seasickness would be no problem. Why couldn’t life go the way I wanted it... Hold on! I couldn’t be so negative! That’s what *Super Positive Parents Raise Healthy Children! Muscles Solve Everything* had said! It was a really good book. It had gotten me to start doing muscle training every day for the past few years. Not that I was sure muscle training helped a dragon all that much, but...

“Ugh...”

In any case, no amount of muscle would help with being seasick. Seeing that Shadow and I were totally exhausted, Olivia pulled on my sleeve.

“Daddy, are you talking about...?” Her eyes sparkled as she asked.

“Yeah... Him.”

“Leave it to me!” Olivia flashed me a bright smile, the face she made when

she just couldn't contain how happy she was to help someone. "Miss Maredia, can you stop the ship? If we're sitting still, and it's two places I know..."

"Ah, the *Demon's Gate*!" It was a very difficult piece of Dark-kin magic Olivia used to travel between our home and her dorm room at the academy.

"Haugh? You want to stop the ship?"

"Can you?"

"Frankly, I have no idea. Hey, you lot! Can you stop this ship?!"

"Yes, Captain. We can fold in the sails, but...why?"

"Tee hee..." Olivia gave the confused crewmate a big smile.

* * *

With a loud, satisfying splash, we jumped out of the *Demon's Gate* Olivia had made.

"Loooong tiiiime noooo seeeee."

"Hi, Mr. Pao Pao!"

The enormous turtle, Pao Pao, had lived around Lake Tritonis for a long, long time. He was slow, but—

"If it's swimming you need, leave it to me."

"Thank you, Mr. Pao Pao!"

"Hah. Since you removed the spear that was stuck in my head tormenting me for so long, it is the least I can do to thank you." After diving deep into the sea, Pao Pao came back up under the ship. The vessel lurched as we lifted up into the air.

"Wh-Whoa!"

"Ho ho ho! My dear friend Olivia, this feels great!"

"Wow! You're amazing, Mr. Pao Pao!"

"Wh-What is going on?! A turtle this big is probably some sort of holy beast. A dragon for a father, and a holy beast for a friend... Just who is this girl...?"

On top of Pao Pao's back, the ship was no longer subject to the wind and the

waves, and so it stopped swaying so much.

“Wh-What...?” Shadow coughed.

“Wow, that’s amazing! I felt so awful before, but I already feel totally better... Thank you, Mr. Pao Pao!”

My seasickness was cured. *Thank you, Pao Pao! And thank you too, Olivia.*

“Tee hee, thank goodness. Are you okay now, Shadow?” Olivia wore a triumphant expression, happy to have found the cure for what ailed us.

* * *

With Mr. Pao Pao’s help, the ship didn’t sway at all. It was awesome! I hadn’t realized how nice it would be to have solid ground under my feet again. At the same time, I did feel the need to reflect a little.

Tee hee, whenever you walk, the ground shakes under my feet!

Olivia had told me that when we had gone out for a walk while I was in my dragon form, not long after we had started living together. I had never realized it before, but it seemed that the ground shook a little whenever I stepped down. Thump, thump. Stomp, stomp. Well, I suppose it did *sound* like it when I walked. I was pretty big; I was a dragon, after all. It was totally different from the cute pitter-patter of Olivia’s feet.

Maybe I was even giving other people and animals around me dragonsickness... Sorry...

It was humbling to finally come across something that even a dragon couldn’t conquer. Like seasickness.

With that issue now resolved, I borrowed the ship’s galley and started cooking to help calm myself down. Several crew members had guessed what happened with Shadow and had started fishing. Some of them brought in some rather large fish too. I supposed I could make them the main dish...but I decided not to ask why they were able to catch so many.

“Th-This is incredible! What’s with this soup...?”

“It reminds me of my mom’s cooking...”

“Fantastic...”

“We don’t need to do any work with that turtle around. I thought we were gonna get fired, but now we’ve got such delicious food...”

“It really warms your heart, huh?”

I was glad the crew was enjoying the food. Cooking really helped me relax. It made me feel like I was doing a good job at being a human. It was one of the things that connected a dragon like me to a human like Olivia.

“Mom, I want seconds!” the crew shouted in unison.

“I’m a daddy, not a mommy! And I’m not your daddy either, I’m Olivia’s!”

It was the first time I had made food for so many people. I was glad I had made friends with Olivia’s classmate Kate, who was studying to become a royal chef. She had given me some invaluable pointers.

Olivia and the others were munching away happily at the closest table.

“Haugh?! You paralyzed the fish before catching them?!”

“You have turned quite wicked in our absence, haven’t you?”

“I-I just didn’t know!”

As I listened in on their conversation, I finished the main focus of my cooking.

“Here we go. I hope this is good enough.”

I had made two dishes. One was salt-grilled fish. The other was something called “sashimi,” which I had learned about in a book called *Delicacies of the World!* Apparently in the East, where Luca had been born, they often ate fish raw. It was my first time handling fish like that, so it felt very, how do you say it... Fresh? I was thankful to the fish. In order for humans to survive, they needed to rely on the lives of other things, didn’t they?

Anyway, normally you were supposed to eat sashimi with something called “soy sauce,” but since we didn’t have any on hand, I had tried a bit of salt and olive oil instead.

“Okay. Hopefully this helps him feel a bit more energetic.” Even after the ship had stopped swaying, Shadow’s coughing continued. He was also still in his tiny

white dragon form, resting in one of the cabins. Staying in his human form took quite a bit of concentration. He had said he wanted “life” to eat, so I had my fingers crossed that he’d like this raw fish.

Plating the food, I went to deliver it to him.

“Daddy, I’ll come with you,” Olivia stopped me.

“Huh?”

“You’re going to see Shadow, right?”

“Uhh, yeah.”

“Can I? I’m worried about him too. Also...”

“Hm?”

“Never mind. Let’s go! I’ll carry it for you!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I hope Shadow feels better soon.”

“Yeah, me too.”

Olivia and I headed to Shadow’s cabin.

* * *

“How are you feeling, Shadow?”

He was balled up in a blanket. When dragons are young, their bodies are smooth and flexible. It had been so long ago for me that I couldn’t remember it at all, but I had probably been like that once too.

Shadow coughed. “Dragon. Olivia.”

“Hey. Do you want to try eating a little?” Olivia put the plates of cooked and raw fish down in front of him. There were ten skewers of broiled fish and a mountain of sashimi. After sniffing it a bit, he quickly dug in.

“Raw fish, delicious... Tastes like, life.”

“I’m glad to hear it!”

“But, too much.”

“Aha ha, I thought so... I guess I got a bit carried away.”

“But...it’s delicious.”

“Thank goodness. It was my first time making it, so I was worried whether it would turn out okay.”

“Why do you pretend to be human, dragon?” Shadow muttered.

I thought about it for a moment. The answer was simple: I was Olivia’s daddy. That’s how I had always answered before, but I felt like that wasn’t what Shadow was asking.

“Why were you in human form earlier, Shadow?”

“Well...”

“You are the first young dragon I’ve ever met.”

“You too... First elder dragon. Still dragons living as dragons... Dad was right.”

“Hey, would you mind talking with us for a bit?”

“Yeah, I want to know too,” Olivia added. “More about you, and about dragons.”

Shadow always seemed sad when he looked at us.

“And about your family too,” I added.

After voicing a soft cry, the small white dragon began to speak. Dividing up the food Shadow wasn’t able to finish, Olivia and I ate while he talked.

* * *

“Dragons, are all gone.” That was the first thing he said.

“What?! I’m gone?!”

“Some dragons, don’t like people, still alive. But no new dragons born. I’m last.” Shadow had been born back when the Six Sages of Riaris, including Phyllis and Esmeralda, were still quite young. The number of dragons had long been in decline, so Shadow’s birth in itself was almost miraculous. “But my father and mother, soon gone. With many small people, not enough magic for many dragons to live.”

“Huh...?” The Dark Queen had said before that the fight between humans and Dark-kin long ago had been over magical energy. This sounded somewhat similar.

“Because not enough magic, I stayed small. Normally, dragons eat magic in the land, and slowly, slowly grow big...but I couldn’t.”

“I see...”

“So if I don’t eat life, I can’t live. Different from ancient dragons, living on the spirit of the mountains, or sea.”

“Shadow...”

“Always alone. When humans see dragons, they hunt us or treat us like gods. Too different from them.”

Olivia squeezed my hand. She must have lost her appetite, as a skewer of fish was sitting untouched in her other hand.

“Dragons and humans are too different...” That was obvious. That’s why I had worked so hard to make sure Olivia could live happily in the human world. We were family, but Olivia was a human. Even if she wanted to stay with me forever, we were totally different creatures. That wouldn’t be what was best for her, as sad as that was. That was the principle I raised her with.

“I was raised by, human...though he was supposed to live much shorter than me.”

“Your daddy...”

“Six thousand years. I wished to be with him forever...so he lived beyond his life span...” Shadow gave another sad cry.

“Wow, that’s a long time.”

“Dragon, how do you think, he did it?”

“Hmm... Not something like guts and willpower, right?”

“Of course not,” Shadow’s tail shook. “He can’t die.”

“Huh?”

“Because of me...because of my wish, he can’t die. Not on purpose, but

somehow my magic and life span were given to him.”

Dragons lived a long time. An *unbelievably* long time. Giving some of our life span to a single human would hardly make a difference to us at all.

“But you don’t have enough magical energy, so you couldn’t grow up...”

“Right. If I was strong, we could be happy together forever. But, small and weak. Not enough magic, so I’m always coughing... Can only sleep.”

What a debacle, I thought. He wanted to be with his father forever, but that small wish had totally warped their lives. Humans didn’t live for six thousand years, and dragons didn’t get sick. If they had lived apart, neither of those would have happened. I was starting to feel sad and uneasy.

“Daddy...”

“Olivia...”

It was possible that the same thing would happen to Olivia and me.

“Dad tried to cure me.”

“Cure you?”

“He tried lots of ways...not very good ways though.” It seemed Shadow, the lost little dragon we had met by chance, had quite a difficult past.

“Shadow!!!”

“Wh-What, Oliv—?!” Shadow was cut off by Olivia sticking a skewer of broiled fish into his mouth.

“Eat this. Daddy made it, it’s really delicious!”

“I-I’m eating... Eating already...”

“O-Olivia?”

Uh, Olivia?

I was completely caught off guard. I had never seen her act like this before. The little dragon chomped away at the food she forced on him, obviously flustered.

“Shadow!”

“Wh-What?”

“Do you like Dad?”

“Huh? Dragon? Can’t really say...”

“No, not my dad. *Your* dad.”

“Uh...” Shadow hung his head. I couldn’t imagine what must have been going through his head. “Umm... Probably, yes.”

“Then we’ll definitely help you!”

“Huh?”

“I will, and Daddy will! And Miss Maredia and Miss Clowria too!” Olivia was always smiling and never ever raised her voice. But now, she was almost pleading with him. “We’ve been on all sorts of adventures. They were really fun. My daddy is super strong so it’ll be okay!”

Shadow stared at her with wide eyes.

“Let’s go back to your home, Shadow! What’s your dad’s name? Where does he live?”

“My, dad’s name...” Shaking his tail a bit, he mumbled the rest. “...Vandilsen.”

“What?!”

The same Vandilsen we were chasing. The fledgling mage I had met so long ago, and also the one responsible for stealing the Hallows from us. Olivia and I shared a look.

“Wh-Whoa!!!”

The ship suddenly lurched to the side. Up until now, the ship had been moving so smoothly it was hard to believe we were on the sea. We could hear some kind of groaning noise coming from outside.

Wh-What’s going on?

“Daddy, is this...Mr. Pao Pao snoring?”

“Snoring?”

It sounded like the earth was rumbling beneath us. I listened closer, making

sure to keep the other two safe, and it *did* sound a little bit like someone was snoring.

“It sounds kinda like your snoring when you get really tired.”

“What?!” *No way! I snore?! “O-Olivia...?”*

This was bad. I didn’t want her to hate me because my snoring was really annoying! I heard that was a common problem among teenage girls...

“What’s wrong, Daddy?”

“N-N-N-N-Nothing!!!”

“Looks like, shocked,” Shadow observed.

“Really?”

“Dad was also sad, when he heard he snored.”

“It’s not that big a deal. It’s not like it bothers me.”

“O-Oh, really...” I would have to be careful. Really, really careful.

Shadow coughed. “Have to be careful. Adults, very sensitive...”

“Good point, Shadow... Whoa!”

With another loud boom, the ship shook again, followed by the sound of water. I started to run.

“Aaah!”

“Uh oh! This isn’t good. Let’s go take a look.”

“Daddy?!”

“You two come with me. It’ll be dangerous if we get separated.” Picking up Olivia, who was holding the tiny dragon Shadow in her arms, I rushed up to the deck. The fact that Olivia was still holding fish in her hands as well-made the whole scene look rather funny.

* * *

To make it back to the deck, we had to pass through the dining hall. Everyone had been happily eating away earlier, but now something was clearly wrong.

“Daddy, something’s wrong. Everyone’s asleep.”

“They are. Is this what you call a food coma?”

We couldn’t hear it before because of Mr. Pao Pao’s loud snoring outside, but everyone here was snoring away happily too. Even the Dark Queen and Miss Clowria were asleep, hand in hand.

“Mmm... Full speed... Starboard...”

“Aye aye, ma’am!”

“Heh heh... My beautiful captain... You have some cookie crumbs on your face...”

They were all talking in their sleep. They really sounded like sailors.

But something was clearly wrong. There was no way everyone would fall asleep like this in the middle of a voyage.

“Maybe something happened on deck...”

“So...sleepy...”

“Uh, Olivia? Shadow?”

Still in my arms, the two of them had started to look very sleepy. Shadow struggled to keep his eyes open as he spoke.

“I can hear...something...”

There was another rumbling sound from outside.

“Ugh, so loud...”

Olivia covered her ears with her hands to block out Mr. Pao Pao’s snoring.

“...Huh?”

“What is it, Olivia?”

“Once I covered my ears, I wasn’t sleepy anymore. I wonder why?”

“Huh? Really?”

“Yeah, I’m not sleepy at all.”

“Shadow is totally asleep though.”

What was going on? Putting Shadow down beside Clowria and the Dark Queen, we headed up to the deck. Opening the door leading outside, we were greeted by an intense storm. There was blowing wind, huge raindrops, and intense waves. And on top of it all, Mr. Pao Pao was snoring!

“Whoa, I can hear him even with my ears covered!”

“I-It’s so loud... Is my snoring really this bad...?” The thought shocked me through and through. I’d have to ask Olivia about it later...

“Wait... I can hear something else too...”

“What is that?”

“I don’t know.” Olivia looked around, her ears still covered, but couldn’t find anything. Using my dragon eyes, I looked off into the distance and...

“Wait, are those...mermaids?!” There were people singing on top of some rocks nearby. Or at least that’s what I thought at first; upon closer inspection, only their top halves seemed to be human. Their lower half was all fish!

“Huh? An old maid? I don’t think there’s anyone like that on this ship.”

“No, Olivia. Mermaids!”

“Man-made?”

“Mermaid! Like the ones in that picture book you like so much!”

“What?! Mermaids...like in *The Tiny Mermaid*?!” Olivia’s eyes started to sparkle, the excitement causing her to lift her hands from her ears. “Ugh, so sleepy...”

“Oh no, Olivia!” I hurriedly covered her ears myself. Luckily, I wasn’t getting sleepy at all. Maybe this all had been caused by those mermaids singing.

“Daddy, I learned in school that long ago, mermaids used to sink ships. Sailors that heard them sing would fall asleep...and then they would be shipwrecked.” Olivia started to shiver.

So that’s why everyone was asleep? That was a big problem. I was really lucky I wasn’t falling asleep myself! That was probably because I was totally different from people like humans and Dark-kin.

“S-So what do we do?” I asked her.

“Hmm... What did the heroes do? I think they put melted wax in their ears so they couldn’t hear the song...”

“That is way too dangerous! We definitely can’t do that!”

“Yeah, I thought so too.”

Humans thought up some pretty crazy things! I definitely wasn’t going to let Olivia try that. As I pondered over what we should do, the waves were drawing Mr. Pao Pao closer to the rocks. At this rate, he’d hit his head really hard. That might even send the boat into the rocks too.

“O-Oh no!”

“Mr. Pao Pao, wake up!”

It didn’t seem like he could hear us. We needed a way to stop him from hearing the mermaids’ song. But how...?

“O-Oh, I could try melting the rocks with my fire breath!”

“But then the mermaids would melt too...”

“Ugh, you’re right. Maybe...I could fly and lift the boat up so high they can’t hear the song anymore?”

“But if you fly, Vandilsen... Shadow’s dad will see you.”

“That’s right...”

Honestly speaking, it seemed like Vandilsen had gotten rather strong, so I figured he would be okay even if we had to be a bit rough with him.

I had figured if things got really bad, I could always fly us to the Dead Continent if I had to. What a scary name. Slowly creeping up on a place with a name like that was a bit unnerving.

But the circumstances had changed. Now that Shadow was with us, I wanted to avoid fighting his dad as much as possible. Why had Vandilsen stolen the Hallows? What was he trying to do with them? I wanted to hear the answers from him. Even though he was a human, some twist of fate had led to him raise a dragon. I didn’t know any humans like that, so I wanted to know what he felt.

I couldn't imagine he was a bad person.

"If everyone's falling asleep, they must be singing a lullaby..." I recalled a lullaby I had learned for Olivia way back when. It hadn't really helped much. Actually, whenever I had tried to sing it, she'd end up wide awake and would start rolling around on the floor laughing. There was no way she could sleep after that.

"In that case..."

"Daddy?"

I had no other choice.

"I'll sing! Louder than the mermaids!"

When we were below deck, where we could only hear Mr. Pao Pao's snoring, Olivia and Shadow weren't sleepy at all. So maybe if I sang loud enough that no one could hear the mermaids, they'd wake up.

"Ahem!"

It was time for the lullaby that I had learned for Olivia. The one that had always made her even more wide awake. Taking a deep breath, I started to sing.

Chapter 6: Mr. Dragon Sings a Lullaby

My plan was a resounding success. After hearing my singing, the mermaids were shocked...and then they all collapsed with laughter. They laughed so hard they were holding their stomachs in pain. The mermaids then began to clap, and they all seemed to look a little excited. They had stopped singing entirely.

Uhh... I was singing with a lot of passion, wasn't I?

A little while later, the crew started to pour out onto the deck and shout.

“M-Mermaids! The legends were true?!”

“We had wax earplugs and everything, but we never even had a chance to use them...”

“What is with this song, though? I’ve never heard it before, but it’s giving me all sorts of energy...”

Having heard my singing voice, the crew started to laugh as well. Some even started to dance. They looked just like Olivia had when she was younger. I had no idea what was going on. It was *supposed* to be a lullaby!

Olivia stood at my side, singing along with me.



This brought all sorts of nostalgic memories to mind, like singing together under the moonlight in the old shrine we called home.

“I’m surprised you remember the words. You were really young when I sang that song for you.”

“Tee hee, I made sure not to forget!”

We got into a steady rhythm, singing together energetically. It was actually starting to be rather fun.

“Haugh... Was I asleep? And what’s with this crazy lullaby?”

“It sounds like the Elder Dragon’s voice... That was a good nap...”

“Hey, don’t fall asleep again, Clowria!”

“I’m sorry, hearing such a...creative lullaby is making me sleepy again.”

“This is indeed the first time I’ve heard one of the Elder Dragon’s lullabies... It gives me the same feeling as that picture Olivia drew of her father a while back.”

“Yes, I understand what you mean.”

The Dark Queen and Clowria smiled as they watched us.

I-Is this lullaby really that creative?

“Stop, you’re making me blush.”

“That wasn’t a compliment!”

“Thanks to Sir Elder Dragon’s singing, we *have* avoided sinking though. Should you not give him thanks, as the captain?”

“Haugh, I suppose.”

Shortly after the two ladies had arrived, Shadow made it up to the deck as well. He seemed much better after eating and sleeping. He was back in the dark-skinned, silver-haired human form we had first met him in.

“Ah... I see. That’s why, I fell in the sea...”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I left home, flying away. Then I was really sleepy...”

“And then you washed up on the beach, huh?”

That meant we were definitely heading in Vandilsen’s direction. The mermaids seemed to have given up on singing entirely for now, but just to be safe, the crew put in their earplugs. Once the storm died down, it should be smooth sailing from here on out.

But it didn’t seem like things would be that easy right now. The rain was getting heavier, and the wind blowing from directly in front of us made it feel like it was raining sideways.

“Aren’t you cold, Olivia?”

“No, I’m okay. Thanks, Daddy.”

“That’s good.”

For the record, I was extremely cold. As I was quite a bit bigger, I could handle chilly weather better than Shadow, but dragons were still very much like large lizards. If it got really cold outside, we’d start slowing down. Unlike lizards though, we could use energy in the air to create a fire inside ourselves so we could still move around. Even so, I still was quite sensitive to the cold.

“Now then, there’s no point in being up on the deck, so let’s go back in—Huh?”

“D-Daddy? Do you hear something?”

We could hear another unnerving, rumbling noise. It sounded like something was below us, writhing beneath the waves.

“Haugh? Is that big turtle still snoring?”

“No, I am quite awake now,” Pao Pao answered.

“Oh? Then...what is this sound?”

I had a bad feeling about this. Though the mermaids had been laughing and smiling at my song from earlier, they now looked at each other with nervous expressions on their faces—and then started to leap back into the sea.

At that moment...

“Whoa!!!”

“Daddy!”

I felt my body being pulled away by something. Something heavy and squishy had wrapped around my body. And some kind of spots on it were sticking to me so I couldn't get it off.

“Wh-Whoa!”

“Elder Dragon!”

“My Queen, this is...!”

“It's...Dad's, kraken!” Shadow exclaimed.

A kraken? Maybe it was Vandilsen's pet or something? I didn't want to be too rough, but I would have to turn back into my dragon form so it would let go—*Uh oh*. It took me a moment to realize I had been dragged underwater. I couldn't breathe. *What do I do now?* My vision was going dark. *That means... I'm drowning!*

After what happened during Olivia's school trip to the lake, I really should have worked hard to learn how to swim. But it was too late to regret that now. If I turned into my dragon form, I'd be so heavy that I'd sink. I wouldn't be able to make it back to the surface...

I was really stuck. Should I use fire to evaporate all the water? No, then I'd end up boiling Mr. Pao Pao and the mermaids... The ship Olivia was on would be in big trouble too.

I couldn't do that at all.

Uh oh... I can't breathe...

* * *

How disappointing, I thought to myself. I had thought an ancient dragon would be able to take on Dad. But dragons of the sea never came up onto land, and dragons of the land never went down into the sea. As a dragon of the land myself, I understood that we weren't made in a way that let us swim.

“Daddy!” The human girl shouted as she ran after him.

Give it up. Dad's pet wasn't just big, it was violent. He had also set those mermaids up around the continent, and they were still sinking any ships that drew close. Dad had kept this kraken for thousands of years. It wouldn't allow anyone to get near him.

I was sure he had realized by now that I was missing. If he was angry, his pets would start to reflect that. That's just how they were made. There was just nothing we could do. Dad had been driven to madness, and it was my fault. There was no stopping him now— "Mr. Pao Pao, please help Daddy!"

"Huh...?"

"Daddy can't swim!"

"Got it! Leeeave iiiit toooo meeee!"

The moment the dragon's daughter shouted at the enormous turtle, it plunged beneath the waves with a splash. The ship that had been sitting on its back was once again floating directly on the water.

This enormous turtle could understand speech. It was likely an ancient, proud creature itself. But no one could defeat the kraken in the ocean. I felt bad for the turtle; its long life would be coming to an end and it'd become food for a squid.

But as I watched Olivia coldly, the surface of the water started to churn.

What? What on earth is happening?

With a roar and a tremendous splash, the kraken was launched out of the water and into the sky.

Huh? What happened?

"Ho ho ho, a turtle's shell might not be a match for a squid, but my age is a different matter!"

"Huh...?!"

The kraken had been thrown up into the air. The elder dragon had returned to his dragon form and flown up out of the water, now free of the creature's tentacles. But the kraken reached out once more. Maybe it had targeted the dragon before because of his song, but this time, it was aiming for the ship.

“If a squid is a fish, then...!” Olivia stretched her hands toward the kraken. Before I could even wonder what she was doing, a flash of brilliant white light blinded me. At the same time, a sound like an explosion filled the air.

Oh, I see.

“...Lightning.”

* * *

Olivia’s lightning bolt struck the kraken midair. The paralyzed monster tumbled down into the sea, creating a huge wave. The lightning hadn’t touched the water at all, so Mr. Pao Pao and the other fish swimming nearby were fine.

“Daddy!”

“Thanks for saving me, Olivia...” I never would have imagined I’d say those words. She’d gotten so capable!

You’ve really grown up, haven’t you?

I dropped down to the deck of the ship where Olivia grabbed my snout in a big hug.

“Thank goodness, Daddy!”

“Thank you, Olivia.”

“Tee hee! Everyone said I shouldn’t do it anymore, but I ended up shocking them again.”

“Yeah... Well, you only hit the squid, and it *was* kind of an emergency...” We avoided looking at the stunned creature, floating on the surface of the water. I did feel a little bad for it.

It might’ve been because of Olivia’s lightning, but the rain had stopped and the clouds had started to thin. With a strong breath upward, I scattered the clouds to put some finishing touches on the weather. As the sun appeared above us once again, the ship’s crew began to celebrate.

“We did it! We beat the sirens and a kraken! Two legendary causes of shipwrecks!”

“Did you see what she just did? That King’s Pupil is really something!”

“Hurray! Tonight’s a squid party! Long live Olivia!”

Cheers for Olivia started up all over the ship.

“Haugh... Look how popular she is... Perhaps the time has come to surrender the seat of Captain to her...” The Dark Queen took off her captain’s hat and put it on Olivia’s head.

“Miss Maredia?”

“Olivia... I entrust this hat to you.”

“Huh?”

“Ahhh! I always wanted to say a line like that! How was it, Clowria? How was it?!”

“It was very cool, my Queen,” Clowria replied with a chuckle.

“Yay!”

“Tee hee, does it look good on me?” Olivia asked.

“Indeed, it looks perfect on you!”

With the giant squid defeated and the weather cleared up, everyone was feeling cheerful.

Good, good.

We had escaped danger, or at least, we had for now.

“Shadow, are you okay?” I asked.

“...Fine,” Shadow nodded. “Dragon, Olivia... Umm...”

“What is it?”

“I want to talk, a little more,” he said, his expression serious. “I know...what Dad wants to use the Hallows for.”

Chapter 7: Mr. Dragon Takes Flight

After taking a bit of meat from the giant squid's...er, the kraken's tentacles, Olivia used her healing magic on it. Once it regained consciousness, it hurriedly swam away, terrified. I guess we had been a bit too rough with it.

Apparently, squid meat would go bad quickly, so we decided to have a grilled squid party right away. It would be a little bitter eaten plain, so I used the same toppings I had for the sashimi from earlier. It didn't seem Shadow had much of an appetite, though.

"Okay, it's done."

"Hurray! Thank you!"

"Here you go, Shadow. I think you should eat a little. We don't want your cough to come back."

"...Okay."

"So... What were you saying about your dad? What is Vandilsen trying to do with the Seven Supreme Hallows?" With a skewer in one hand, I sat down on the deck.

There was nothing to impede our view, so we could see the sea stretching off into the horizon in every direction. The sun seemed like it was sinking into that endless expanse of water. It was a world with nothing but the sea, the sky, and our boat (and Mr. Pao Pao). As we watched the setting sun, shining like a jewel over the water, Shadow carefully chose his words.

"The place we are heading, for a long time no ships have come there...because of my Dad. That's why mermaids, and the kraken. Dad, protecting the continent."

"Why is that?"

"If you spend time in the Dead Continent...you lose your life."

“Huh?” I couldn’t ignore that. I didn’t want to expose Olivia to that kind of danger.

“Dad said there was something, called the Shooting Star Ritual. Can grant any wish.”

“We heard you need all of the Seven Supreme Hallows for that,” Olivia said.

“Yes. Dad...because of my wish...probably—”

At that moment, a powerful gust of wind blew in from out of nowhere. The captain’s hat Olivia was wearing flew off her head and fluttered high up into the sky.

“Haugh, the hat!” the Dark Queen shouted around a mouthful of squid, which, despite the circumstances, she wasn’t willing to give up.

“This wind is...”

“The same as at the capital!”

“Haugh, everyone, take cover!”

“My liege, perhaps you shouldn’t be giving orders while your mouth is full of food.”

“B-But squid isn’t that easy to swallow...”

The fierce wind brought with it a figure, flying toward us from the east. It was Vandilsen. He glared down at us with a really scary expression on his face.

“You... You kidnappers!”

Kidnappers?

Vandilsen’s gaze was locked on Shadow. Slowly, as if putting on a show, he raised his arms into the air and then brought them down. As he did, a gust of wind lifted spheres of water up into the air and drove them down onto the deck of the ship. The water struck the deck in a rapid, harsh staccato.

“Ahhh!”

“Look out! Find somewhere to hide!”

“Ow! Owwww!”

To the human crew, the unnatural rain shower felt like being struck by pieces of metal. The Dark Queen created a barrier to protect the crew around her, but the wooden crates on the deck were being thrown around and the sails were torn apart. It was a disaster! Mr. Pao Pao tucked his head and legs into his shell, so at least for now, he was safe.

“Olivia, come here!”

“Okay, Daddy!”

I immediately moved to protect Olivia. I reached a hand out to Shadow, who was staring stunned up at the sky, but the shadows around him started to move.

“Shadow.”

“...Dad.”

Stepping out of the writhing shadows, Vandilsen wrapped the boy in a hug—exactly the same way I did to Olivia.

“You... That hair, those eyes... Are you a dragon?”

“Oh, Vandilsen... Uhh...” Saying something like “long time no see” didn’t seem appropriate right now.

“Why did you abduct Shadow?”

“Didn’t, abduct... Dad, I...”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to say anything, Shadow. Are you feeling okay? Our dream will soon come true... You don’t have to worry anymore...”

“Dad...” Shadow tried to speak again, but was interrupted by a coughing fit.

“See? I told you not to speak!”

“Shadow, are you okay?” I asked.

“He needs no concern from you, kidnapper!”

“No, I told you, I...”

As I struggled to explain myself, Vandilsen clicked his tongue and lifted

himself back into the sky.

That was kind of rude...

“I will make you regret trying to harm my beloved son. The monsters of the sea will claim your ship without fail.” At Vandilsen’s declaration, the crew started to wail.

“We’re gonna have to deal with more of them?!”

“But I still have thirty years left on my mortgage!”

“Don’t kill us!”

The Dark Queen and Clowria were trying to calm them down, but they were clearly on the edge of panic.

“You...” The Dark Queen rose to her feet. Normally she was flustered and panicky herself, but now she was different. “What do you think you’re doing to my crew?!” Black flames shot out from the Dark Queen.



The normally gentle Dark Queen must have been furious to resort to violence like that. Fire flickered in the air surrounding her. That was the Dark Queen's magic. The face of the leader who led the Dark-kin to war against the entire Human Realm had resurfaced—something that only happened when she was angry for someone else's sake. No, it was better to say that she was now *able* to get angry for someone else. That must have been a result of overcoming the trials before her during our summer adventure.

“Please, wait!”

The balls of black flame shot toward Vandilsen in quick succession despite Shadow being in his arms.

“Fear not, the little dragon will not be harmed!”

“Hmph.” Vandilsen snapped his fingers. With that small movement, an invisible barrier appeared and blocked the Dark Queen's attack.

“Haugh?!”

“No way, my Queen's magic...!”

Vandilsen looked down at her, his expression unchanged. Gleaming on his finger was the Gem of Earth, the artifact that had protected the Dark Realm for so long. He likely had the Gem of Light that had kept Shutora safe on him as well.

The surface of the sea began to churn again, a sign of the strong wind from before returning.

“Dragon, Olivia!” Shadow struggled to speak through another coughing fit. Between the intense winds and his incessant coughing, it was almost impossible to hear him. “Help! Stop, Dad!”

However, I understood him clearly. Dragons have very good ears, after all.

The wind blew once again, carrying Vandilsen away to the east. After a few blinks, even I couldn't see him anymore.

“Lost Origin, tell me where the other six gems are!”

Olivia immediately pulled out the Lost Origin. A quick beam of rainbow-colored light shot off after Vandilsen.

The Dark Queen and Clowria groaned. “Haugh... He blocked my fastball head-on...and with that wind and the water, there’s no doubt he was using the Hallows.”

“I concur. It seems he has yet to perform the Shooting Star Ritual. Even I could still feel the powerful magic inside the gems.”

“Looks like he’ll be a tough opponent.”

“Yes, quite tough indeed.”

Olivia looked up at me. “Daddy, we need to save Shadow!”

“Olivia...!”

Help! Stop, Dad!

Had Olivia heard him too? No, even without catching what he had said, Olivia would definitely want to save her friend. She was kind like that.

The Dark Queen cleared her throat. “Elder Dragon!”

“Miss Dark Queen...?”

“You are going to pursue him, yes?”

“Yeah, that was the plan.”

“Okay. Leave this ship to me!” the Dark Queen puffed up proudly, picking up the captain’s hat from where it had fallen back onto the deck. “Olivia, I’ll be taking this hat back now!”

“Okay!”

“Mwa ha ha! I am once again Captain Maredia!” After taking a deep breath, she shouted to encourage the crew, who were still shaking from Vandilsen’s words. “Everyone! Do you want to return home safely?!”

“Yeah!”

“Then full speed ahead! Put some backbone into it!”

“Yeah!”

“Any enemy that dares threaten this ship will have to face me, Captain Maredia, and my fearsome magic! There is no need to fear!”

The crew erupted into roars and cheers.

It was amazing. In the blink of an eye, everyone’s motivation had been restored. This must have been the Dark Queen’s true power!

“Sir Elder Dragon, Olivia, I believe staying here for much longer would be quite risky,” Clowria said. “My Queen and I shall take responsibility for returning everyone here home safely.” The crew was made up of ordinary humans. We wanted to avoid putting them in danger as much as possible.

“Thanks, Clowria. But we, uhh...”

“I understand, Olivia. You are going to chase after Shadow, are you not?”

“Yeah.”

“The Dead Continent in the far east... I am sure with Sir Elder Dragon at your side you will be fine, but please, be careful.”

“Yeah, you too!”

“Of course. Once the situation has been explained to the leadership, we will follow after you immediately. There is no doubt that man intends to use the Hallows for no good.”

“...Yeah.”

Vandilsen, what on earth are you planning?

“Be careful. Shadow said that anyone on the Dead Continent has their life sapped from them or something...”

“Do not worry. We are still Dark-kin, and have so many reliable people with us.”

“O-Okay.”

For now, the Dark Queen would retreat. And we—

“Okay, we’ll head out first then!”

“See you later, everyone!”

Returning to my dragon form, I spread my wings wide. Lifting up into the sky, I was met with cheers from the crew.

“It’s the dragon! He’s huge!”

Apparently, some of them still got really excited when they saw me. It was a bit embarrassing.

We had traveled by ship to avoid being noticed by Vandilsen, but there was no point in doing that anymore.

“Let’s go, Olivia. Hold on tight to my mane.”

“Okay!”

We were back to our normal method of going places, a pleasant journey through the sky. No more seasickness and no more camping. This was really the best way for us to travel.

* * *

The Dead Continent. The land mass, though perhaps it was more like a large island than a small continent, was aptly named. The plant life had all withered and died. There were no living things anywhere. And at its center was a long-forgotten castle, inhabited by Vandilsen and Shadow alone.

“You must have been quite scared, Shadow... To think you’d be abducted by savages like that. I cannot forgive them for doing something so terrible just for something stupid like saying they captured a dragon alive.”

“N-No... Dad, I ran...”

“Yes, you must still be confused. But do not worry. Mere humans could never hope to reach this place.”

“Dad...” Before he could continue, Shadow collapsed into another coughing fit.

“My goodness. Are you okay, Shadow? If you push yourself too hard, you’re

going to keep coughing like this. I am sure they are sleeping at the bottom of the sea by now, so you can rest easy.”

“Dad...stop, this... Don’t need, Hallows... I’m okay...”

“Don’t say that, Shadow, my precious child.”

Shadow’s eyes were growing heavy. Vandilsen looked down with a gentle smile on him, but Shadow was on the verge of tears as he collapsed into sleep. Vandilsen gently lifted him up in his arms.

“Now, come. Rest well... Tomorrow is a full moon.”

Shadow’s breathing became soft and even.

“Finally, finally, our dream can come true, Shadow.”

“Dad...”

“Yes, let us live together forever, just the two of us. True immortality will let us do that.”

Vandilsen had lived for six thousand years despite being an ordinary human. How had he done that? It had taken countless unreasonable measures.

The first part of his journey to immortality had begun when his beloved son, the child of dragons, had accidentally split his own life energy and given some of it to him. If the dragon stopped doing that, Vandilsen would immediately die, but if the man maintained this enchantment in this magic-starved continent, Shadow’s condition would continue to worsen. With no other choice, Vandilsen took over the land and began to absorb life from it.

The amount of life energy he had to absorb to accomplish something absurd like immortality had driven the continent to its current state. No living things had been born there since. His curse, which slowly drained the life from all things on the continent, had turned it into a dead land. Even in the beginning, the continent hadn’t been particularly abundant, so when it was made into a sacrifice for Vandilsen’s magic, it gradually fell into ruin.

Even so, the life and magical energy of the continent had been able to hold on for a short time. By infiltrating his way into great empires and small families alike while working as a powerful mage, Vandilsen was able to gather all sorts

of information. And finally, he had found his chance. He had heard of a set of wonderful jewels, each holding within more magic than an entire continent held.

“But if I had all Seven Supreme Hallows... If I had the magic in all of them and could perform the Shooting Star Ritual, then...” Vandilsen chuckled. True immortality would be his. He would finally be able to live happily with Shadow. They didn’t need anyone else. They’d live on forever, in this very castle.

* * *

We soared through the clouds. It was just the sky, the sea, and the two of us. Aboard our ship, we had the friends we were traveling with, but now that we were flying through the sky, there was nothing but blue around us. I flew forward, heading to the yet unseen continent.

“Wow, this is amazing... It feels great!”

“Yeah, but...I’m a little scared,” Olivia replied.

“Are you okay? Should I slow down a bit?”

“It’s okay, Daddy!” Clinging to my mane, Olivia’s small hands weren’t shaking in the least, and her voice was full of determination. When had she turned into such a magnificent person? She wouldn’t stay as the child I had known forever. She must have found something very important to her. “You know, Daddy, I’m okay. Because Miss Maredia and Miss Clowria said they’d leave it to us. And I’m the King’s Pupil. And I really want to save Shadow.”

“...Yeah.”

“Tee hee, but flying like this really is fun, isn’t it?”



“Yeah, that’s right.” I sped up a little more. There was no way Olivia would get thrown off my back now.

I was a dragon, and Olivia was a human. We were different, but we were still family. I truly believed in her from the bottom of my heart.

Chapter 8: Mr. Dragon Meets a Slime

“There’s really nothing here, huh...”

We had finally made it to the Dead Continent, and we were taken aback. It was totally unlike anywhere else we had seen before. The lush magical energy that filled the verdant Holy Mount of Olympias was nowhere to be seen. There was no refreshing breeze like the one that blew through the grasses around the Florence Royal Academy for Girls. It was a totally barren land, populated by nothing but clouds of dust. I never imagined that there could be a place like this.

“Daddy... This place feels kind of sad, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, it does.”

“Let’s hurry up and find Shadow. Hold on, let me ask the Lost Origin...” But Olivia suddenly fell into a coughing fit.

“Are you okay, Olivia?”

“Yeah, sorry. Suddenly my throat—” Just like Shadow, whenever she tried to talk, she’d start coughing. It seemed he was right when he said the land here stole people’s energy.

“Let’s leave for now.” It would be best for us to step off the continent for a bit. Since Olivia had been raised on Olympias, and by a dragon no less, I had heard that magical energy had totally suffused her body. I thought that would have made her okay in this place, but the land here was more dangerous than I had expected.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What is this? What a surprise!”

“Huh...?” As Olivia climbed onto my back, I thought I heard something. “Hm... Okay, let’s go.”

“W-W-W-W-Wait!” Again, I heard something gurgle behind us.

Gurgle?

I looked back to see a slippery-looking mass sitting on the dry earth. It was bubbly, translucent, shapeless, and shaking. Olivia and I both cried out in surprise. It looked super gross!

I mean, look at it!

“O-O-O-O-Oh, you finally noticed me.” The shapeless blob was speaking to us. It was like a mass of translucent, talking water.

“A slime...?” Slimes were a primordial species that Olivia said she had learned about in Magical Biology class.

* * *

“Uh, we were just thinking of leaving for a bit...”

“D-D-D-Don’t worry. If she does not touch the ground, the land will not affect her.”

“Oh! I see!”

“Y-Y-Y-Y-Yes... You can believe me, for I watched this land fall to ruin.” Every time it spoke, its whole body shook like jelly. Its voice was also shaky, so it took a bit of time to understand what it said. When we asked the bizarrely shaking creature to tell us its name, it didn’t give us an answer.

“I-I-I-I-I am a slime. Nothing more, nothing less.” After staring at us for a time, that dignified proclamation was the best we got. (We couldn’t actually see its eyes, but we could feel it looking at us.) “So there are still slimes around... We were taught in school that they went extinct five thousand years ago.”

“Oh, really?”

“Before other more complex animals started living on the surface, there were a lot of slimes. But that was a long time ago, even before the Age of Dragons.”

“Wow!” In that case, did that mean this slime was older than I was?

“S-S-S-S-So slimes have disappeared from other places, have they?”

“Yeah, because the other animals that started living there took their magical energy.”

“I-I-I-I-I see. This land was never that prosperous, as you can see. S-S-S-S-So I

only survived because all other life died out..." the slime spoke, its shaky voice heavy with emotion. It still felt kind of gross...but it felt a bit mean to say that. It had come all the way here to greet us as visitors, after all.

"Uhh... Can I ask why you came out to talk to us?" I asked.

"Th-Th-Th-Th-The child of the youngster who made the land like this, the sick dragon, he asked me to."

"Shadow!" So this slime was a friend of Shadow's. I never expected him to know someone like this.

"P-P-P-P-Precisely! As you can see, a formless slime like me can squeeze in anywhere, so despite his imprisonment, we are quite good friends."

"Oh, I see..." Hearing the slime say "imprisonment" caused a sharp pain in my chest. Shadow must have known he was risking his life to leave home. Apparently, the slime had helped him to escape.

"Th-Th-Th-Th-The sick dragon requested my help in escaping, so I assisted him."

The slime then guided us onward. We followed it, with Olivia sitting on my back. Though the castle ahead of us was mostly enshrouded in dust, someone with good eyes could still pick me out from there since I was so large. Just in case, I made myself as small as I could without letting Olivia's feet touch the ground. If Vandilsen got angry, I had no idea what kind of violent things he would do.

I had expected the slime to move fairly slowly, but it gathered itself up into something like a ball and started hopping across the landscape. It was actually unexpectedly fast! Olivia watched the slime's back with rapt attention, having never seen something move like that before. Well, at least I assumed that was its back...

"Th-Th-Th-Th-The castle has quite a serious wall built around it," the slime gurgled.

Does that mean we won't be able to get close?

"N-N-N-No, you can still approach. However, the closer you get, the more life

energy it will try and absorb.”

“That sounds scary.”

“H-H-However, if you follow this path, you will be safe.” The slime bounced forward, heading toward a large hole in the ground. Apparently, it was a shortcut to the distant castle. “L-L-L-Long ago, there were large moles and earth spirits living in these parts, but they have all long since departed. Perhaps they have found a new place to call home.”

“Ummm... Spirits can only live in very specific places now,” Olivia explained. For example, take the wind spirits we met in the Chirin Forest, the sylphs. However, even they didn’t have enough power left to speak in words. I remembered there being spirits like that all over the place before I’d holed myself up in my mountain.

Apparently, this place becoming the Dead Continent was a result of Vandilsen doing something crazy. But it was possible the continent we lived on was changing too. No, it was definitely changing. You could definitely see the differences after watching it for a long time.

Stepping into the hole, we continued on the path leading deep underground. Walking through pitch blackness sounded a little scary, so Olivia used some magic to make a light.

“Huh? That’s all?” Olivia said, confused. Normally, I would have expected her to make a light so bright it blinded everyone, but only the very tip of her finger lit up.

“I don’t think using too much magic here is a good idea,” I said.

“Okay,” Olivia agreed from atop my back.

Let’s hurry.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What do you think? I spent thousands of years digging this tunnel, all to see that boy’s face.”

“You can get to the castle through here?”

“I-I-I-I-Indeed!” the slime nodded. “Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh-Shadow told me you came here in search of six large jewels.” The stolen members of the Seven Supreme

Hallows. Did that mean this slime knew where they were? “N-N-N-No, I have no idea. This hole leads to Shadow’s bedroom. I have never gone any further than that.”

“And you’ve been here for thousands of years?”

“A-A-A-A powerless slime like me is different from a dragon like you,” the slime gurgled angrily.

“S-Sorry...”

“I-I-I-It is fine, as long as you understand. But truly, even a small light makes the journey much easier.”

“Tee hee, I’m glad to hear it.”

“So you *can* tell when it’s light or dark?”

“O-O-O-Of course!” It snorted proudly, though I wasn’t sure if it was actually breathing in the first place and if it *could* snort. “Though I appear weak, I am the last survivor of this continent, after all,” it gurgled. “If Shadow’s father intends further wickedness, I will assist you in stopping him.”

“Even though you’re a powerless slime?”

“Th-Th-Th-This dragon!”

“Ow!”

The slime threw itself and hit me in the side.

I thought you said you were powerless!

“E-E-E-E-Even a slime can do this much!”

“Ugh... I don’t have anything against you, Mr. Slime, but I’m not good with things that are so jiggly...” Every time I looked at it, shivers went down my back.

Olivia leaned forward to whisper in my ear. “Tee hee, so you have weak points too, huh?”

“I guess so...” I always tried to be a cool, reliable Daddy for Olivia, but I had just easily admitted a weakness right in front of her. That must have been a sign of how much Olivia was growing up.

We continued through the dark tunnel, eventually reaching a light ahead of us. Upon seeing it, the slime gurgled again.

“What is it, Mr. Slime?”

“Th-Th-Th-That is Shadow’s bedroom.”

“Oh!”

“S-S-S-S-Sometimes, that human youngster is there as well, so be careful.”

“Thank you, Mr. Slime!” Olivia smiled at the slime from on my back, stretching out a hand toward it. The slime in turn stretched out toward her. Seeing it change shape like that was scary too.

“Tee hee, thank you!”

“M-M-M-My pleasure.”

Olivia gave the slime a squishy pat, and it responded by trembling in a way we hadn’t seen before.

I-It’s embarrassed!

“I-I-I-I-I shall now take my leave. I am but a powerless slime, after all.”

“Hey, Mr. Slime?” I stopped the slime as it made to leave.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What is it?”

“Have you been living in this place alone all this time?” The slime said it had watched this place transform into the Dead Continent. All by itself, living without a chance of having a family... I could understand how lonely that would be.

I was the same way before I met Olivia. All I did was doze off surrounded by greenery, watching the little people live their lives from far away. But this slime was all alone, with no one but Shadow to talk to. It must have been really looking forward to meeting us.

“Th... Th-Th-That is true.”

“Is there anything we can do for you?”

The slime shook a little. I got the impression it was shaking its head from side

to side. “N-N-N-N-No, nothing at all. Getting to meet someone who came here from the outside world, and on top of that, to see a great dragon like in the days of old? That is more than sufficient to make me happy.”

“I see. Thanks for bringing us here then, Mr. Slime.”

There was no response.

“Mr. Slime...?”

“Huh? Daddy, where did it go?” Aside from our voices, there was nothing but the sound of dripping water in the tunnel.

Ah, I thought. It must have been waiting a long time for us to arrive.

“It was probably something like a ghost.”

“A gh-ghost?!” Olivia’s eyes went wide.

I couldn’t help but chuckle. There were a lot of things Olivia still found scary. But it was okay. Mr. Slime had brought us here, so we had to do our job.

We had to stop Vandilsen.

* * *

Gurgle, gurgle.

The slime listened to the gentle footsteps of the dragon fading into the distance. Having survived for so long in this extreme environment, it had watched the other creatures that lived here disappear one by one.

At some point, it had met the young dragon boy. He was very sick and always worried about his human father. His father had found some way to live for a very long time, despite being human. But the man always seemed busy, like something was chasing him.

The slime knew this continent had ended up this way because of the dragon’s father. But for some reason, it didn’t feel angry with him at all. The land had undergone a long, gentle decay. Even without the man’s intervention, this land would have met the same fate eventually. New life and a new civilization would eventually overwrite this ruined land. The only difference was that for the first time in the slime’s long life, that new life had not yet come.

The slime was a single-celled organism that could survive here even with barely any magical energy left in the environment. As it wandered over the remnants of many other kinds of life for so long, it eventually came to understand words. It became able to think for itself a little. It learned how to speak with the young dragon.

It's because I said I'd be lonely without Dad.

That was the reason the boy gave for the state of this continent. Unlike other creatures, the slime had always been by itself, so it could easily understand the lonely feelings of the small dragon.

So the ones who will bring an end to Shadow's regrets are a dragon and his human daughter...

The slime couldn't help but think it was an interesting coincidence.

It had been awake for far too long. The slime decided to sleep, and wondered how this land would appear when it next opened its eyes.

Gurgle, gurgle...

Chapter 9: Mr. Dragon Sneaks In

After making our way down the very long tunnel, we exited into a child's bedroom. The entrance to the tunnel was hidden behind a bookshelf that could be slid to the side. The room was filled with stuffed animals, picture books, and toys, all arranged neatly and tidily. The items on the shelves all looked old and worn out, but everything had clearly been arranged with great care. Perhaps the few items on the shelves were there because they were more important to him.

"So this is where Shadow escaped from." I found it interesting that we could easily tell it was Shadow's based on the things lying in the room. It felt a bit strange though, since we hadn't known him for all that long. There weren't any books that seemed similar to the kind Olivia liked, but instead, there were little stuffed dragons and model boats here and there.

"Looks like I'm not coughing in here," Olivia said with a relieved expression as she stepped off my back. It seemed like the continent wouldn't steal magic from you if you weren't touching the ground outside. I guess the tunnel had brought us under the wall and right into the castle. Without that slime's help, getting inside wouldn't have been easy. I couldn't help but feel grateful for that mysterious encounter.

"Shadow's not here, huh?"

"I guess he went somewhere else."

The bed was empty, but still a little warm. Maybe Shadow had been sleeping here recently.

"Did he go to the bathroom?"

"Hopefully that's all..."

We waited there for a while, but there was no sign of him returning.

"...Maybe it's number two..."

“Hmm...” It was also possible he was in his little dragon form and had found somewhere else to hide and sleep. “Let’s look around,” I suggested. Being in my human form would make looking around much easier, so I decided to transform.

“Huh...?”

For some reason, I was stuck in my dragon form. No matter how many times I tried, I couldn’t transform. I could make myself bigger or shrink as much as I liked, but I couldn’t change forms completely.

“Hmm, this place is pretty strange after all.”

“I can’t use any magic either,” Olivia said.

It seemed that since Vandilsen had spent so much time working on this place, it operated on different principles than the outside world.

Well, I guess I’ll stay like this then.

Shadow didn’t seem to be in this room, so it would be best to find Vandilsen as soon as possible. I wanted to meet him and find out why he had stolen the Hallows. I also wanted to find out what he planned to use them for, and why Shadow had asked us to stop him.

“Let’s go, Daddy.” Olivia spoke, her voice much more forceful than usual.

“Olivia?”

“This room... It feels really lonely.”

“Lonely?”

“Yeah,” Olivia nodded. “Shadow has always been here, but...the toys and books are all covered in dust.”

“Oh, so they are...”

It seemed like the items here hadn’t been touched in ages. The old books were faded to the point you couldn’t really make out the words or pictures anymore. You could tell just by looking at them that the pages were faded not just from the passage of time, but because they were well loved and had been read countless times. After all, they had been kept in this room for so long.

“Shadow never smiled while he was with us, did he?” Olivia said.

“Yeah. I noticed that too.”

“I thought maybe he was just uneasy because he was lost, so I tried to think of ways to make him feel better. I had a lot of fun going fishing and trying out clamming, but he didn’t smile at all.” Olivia looked like she was about to break into tears.

Don’t cry, Olivia. It’s not your fault at all. We just met him by chance—

“Being alone sounds really scary.”

“Olivia...”

“Shadow flew over the sea by himself. That must have been really scary. I know what that’s like.”

That’s right. On that cold day so long ago, Olivia had braved the deep forest alone to make it to my shrine. Believing the cruel lie she had been told, that she was the child of a dragon, she had come in search of me.

“He didn’t smile when his dad came to find him either. They’ve been living together here the whole time, right? Just the two of them... So why wasn’t he happy to see his dad again?”

Tears started rolling from her eyes. An empty child’s bedroom, in a castle that stood in the middle of a barren wasteland, where only the two of them lived.

“Yeah, I see what you mean.”

Ah, that’s how it is, I thought. This was the exact opposite of our situation. We lived as a family of four on a mountain full of greenery. It wasn’t just me and Olivia. We had the Dark Queen and Miss Clowria too. Olivia also had her classmates, and I had even made friends with a fellow father.

Recently, Olivia’s room in our house had become really messy. Books overflowed from shelves and souvenirs and stuffed animals were scattered all over the floor. Olivia said she couldn’t throw any of them away. They all held precious memories for her, so she had to keep everything, even down to the smallest pebble. I had suggested she turned one of the rooms in the castle into a Memory Museum, but she and the Dark Queen had just sighed like I had

missed the point entirely. I was finally starting to understand why that was.

“Let’s go save Shadow. He asked us to stop his dad... I don’t know what we can do, but we can at least stand by his side.”

“Okay.” Olivia wiped the tears from her face, then pulled the Lost Origin out of her bag. “Please, tell us where the Hallows are.”

In response to her voice, a thick beam of light...didn’t shine at all! *What?*

“Hm?”

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

“Oh, maybe it’s because I can’t use any magic here?”

“Whaaat?!”

We couldn’t use any magic inside the castle. Something was probably sucking up all the magic in here and taking it somewhere else.

You’re pretty good, Vandilsen.

“But we still have to find Shadow.”

“Yeah... In that case, we have no other choice.”

Olivia and I nodded to each other.

* * *

“Shaaaadooooow!”

“Hey, Shadow! Where are you?!”

We called out in loud voices as we searched throughout the castle. It was a very simple way to find a lost child. Running through the castle in my dragon form would be a bit tough, but even with Olivia on my back, I could walk around without too much trouble. Vandilsen might find us first, but we’d cross that bridge when we got to it. Right now, finding Shadow was our top priority. I felt strongly like we had to do that, no matter what.

* * *

Vandilsen looked over his collection of glowing jewels with satisfaction.

“Yes, this is perfect.”

His beloved son was sleeping on a bed nearby. Surrounding him were six of the Seven Supreme Hallows. The annoying preparations for the Shooting Star Ritual were complete. He would finally be able to tap into the enormous stores of magical energy within the gems.

Long ago, back when he had been an inexperienced mage, he had wished to live just as long as Shadow. That had all been a mistake. The ritual had ended up stealing Shadow's magic to sustain his own life, and it had made Shadow unable to mature into an adult. Of course, as the last dragon, he had been born in a totally different environment than the elder dragons of old, and he had already been weak from birth.

"With this, you will finally be free of my curse, Shadow..."

There was a chance the ritual would lead to Vandilsen's own death, but he had accepted that. With the magic of the Hallows, he could strengthen Shadow's body. Shadow would finally be able to grow older. Vandilsen had spent a long, long time wringing every drop of life out of this continent. But that all would all end today.

"We'll be together forever," Vandilsen smiled gently. When Shadow next opened his eyes, everything would be over. He would definitely be happy.

But then, something caught his attention.

"Heeeeey, Shadow!"

"Shadow, where are you?!"

Vandilsen frowned. The voices sounded somehow familiar, but he couldn't quite place them. He couldn't remember where he had heard them before. Were they the kidnappers he had encountered on that ship?

How unpleasant. No one else had the right to call Shadow's name like that.

* * *

Out on the sea, even the largest of ships looked like no more than a small leaf. Only one such leaf floated on the ocean now, cutting through the water and heading east terrifically fast. The ship was being pulled by a rope at a speed that

boggled the mind. The crew was nowhere to be seen, but Maredia stood on the deck, trembling under her captain's hat.

"Haugh, since when can turtles swim with such speed?!"

Esmeralda stood at her side, arms crossed and a triumphant expression on her face. "That is not just the speed of a turtle, Dark-kin. Look."

"I am much more veloci-tous than you!"

"Ho ho ho, I won't lose to you!"

In her school swimmers, Luca was making full use of her water magic specialty to swim through the ocean. Though, rather than swimming, it looked more like she was sprinting across the surface of the water!

"Dragon of water, whose blood runs in my veins! Now is the time to show your true power!"

"This old turtle won't lose to the likes of you!"

Normally, it would take days to reach the Dead Continent that sat on the eastern edge of the sea. But at this rate, it felt like they were going to make it in a matter of hours.

"It is a good thing we got such a high-class ship," the young noblewoman Daisy said.

"If we had just waited for the kingdom to give us one, it would have taken years. It really pays to have money and authority, doesn't it?" remarked the young jeweler, Ruby.

"You can leave any hand-to-hand combat to me. I will take care of scouting as well," announced the little soldier, Iriya.

"And you can't fight on an empty stomach, can you? Dinner's here!" declared Kate, the beloved daughter of the royal chef.

"Me too... I'll do my best...!" Lena was acting like a wartime reporter, using the same pen and paper that had brought her fame and popularity at the academy. The sylphs of the Chirin Forest were with her, so they could all still hear each other just fine, no matter what kind of wind they were dealing with.

After hearing that Olivia had set off to save a new friend, her classmates had immediately assembled to help. They were all Olivia's precious friends, led by the Director of the Florence Royal Academy for Girls, Phyllis herself, who stood at their sides with a smile.

"It looks like the future of our kingdom has all gathered in one place, doesn't it?" she chuckled.

"Mother, was it really okay for me to come too?"

"Of course, Seraphy." Her beloved daughter was with her as well. She was the young gardener whose love of plants had founded an entire new branch of magical studies. "I have heard that all plant life in the Dead Continent has withered away and died. I am sure your skills will be invaluable in finding out the cause and cure."

"Mother...!"

Luckily, none of them were suffering from seasickness.

As they approached the continent in the far east, the pets Vandilsen had kept for so long—from sirens to giant squids to whales—had assailed them, but they had been no match for the combined powers of everyone aboard the ship. The ship continued onward, undaunted.

"Haugh! Land ho, men!"

"We are not men, Marie!" Luca shouted from in front of the ship at Maredia's voice. "We are all ladies!"

"Haugh... That doesn't sound pirate-like at all, though."

"I thought of bringing this up earlier as well," Clowria chuckled, "but we're not pirates either, my liege."

In some ways, the atmosphere aboard the ship was both tense and relaxed as they drew close to the Dead Continent. They all had one objective: to help Olivia and her father.

"Though, I suspect maybe they didn't need us to come at all..."

"That's wrong, Miss Phyllis." In a rare show of independence, the honor student Daisy raised her voice. "We're here because we want to help our

friend.”

“True. How reliable of you,” Phyllis chuckled.

“Miss Phyllis?”

“It’s nothing. Olivia truly is a great King’s Pupil, isn’t she?”

With the long life span afforded to elves, she had seen many humans come and go, so there was something she could understand better than anyone else.

The strongest person in the world is the one with reliable friends.

A strong ocean breeze followed their ship to shore.

Chapter 10: Mr. Dragon Gives Chase

“Where could Shadow be?” No matter how much we ran around the castle, there was no sign of him. Could he have been hidden somewhere? The castle was quite large, and we hadn’t checked every nook and cranny yet. Even our home had hidden rooms, a sealed library, and a secret fountain connected to the Dark Realm.

“What do we do?” Olivia said. “I’m sure Shadow is feeling really helpless right now.”

“I guess there’s a limit to what we can do by ourselves.”

We racked our brains for a solution. Normally in a situation like this, the Dark Queen or one of our friends would help us out, giving us a hint or inspiring us. I was a dragon, and Olivia was an unbelievably cute and talented King’s Pupil. But there were still plenty of things we weren’t good at.

“Not enough people...”

“Or maybe, not enough energy...” We both slumped down, disheartened.

At that moment, I felt something on my back, near where Olivia was sitting. A slight breeze had shaken the hair of my mane. It was really, really faint, but it seemed like there was a wind blowing from somewhere in the castle.

“Huh?”

“What’s wrong, Daddy?”

“Did you sneeze just now, Olivia?”

“No.”

“Did you yawn?”

“I said I didn’t!” she replied, angrily smacking the back of my neck. Though, honestly, it just felt like a massage.

“Then what was that wind...?”

“Wind?”

“Yeah, I felt some wind a second ago... Oh, there it is again.”

This time it was much stronger. Olivia seemed to have felt it as well and she suddenly perked up.

“Daddy, I know this wind.”

“Oh?”

“From the Chirin Forest... It’s the sylphs!” The moment Olivia said their name, the small wind fairies came flying down the hallway. It was the sylphs after all!

“That must mean Lena and Miss Martell are here too!”

“Wow! They made it all the way here since they fly and don’t have to touch the ground!”

“Twee! ♪” The sylphs happily clustered around Olivia, who gladly patted their heads in return.

“Tee hee, thank you for coming! We were feeling a little down because we just got stuck.”

“Twee. Twee! ♪” The sylphs were dancing around in front of my nose too. I guess that meant they had taken a liking to us.

“Huh?” I suddenly realized I could hear a voice in the wind, coming with the sylphs.

“Heeey! Elder Dragooooon! Oliviaaaaa!” It was the Dark Queen’s voice.

“Miss Maredia is here!” Her voice was being carried by the wind. It seemed the sylphs were bringing it here for us. Even though we couldn’t use magic in the castle, it seemed no one could stop the wind.

“Hey, I can hear them!”

“We can’t find Shadow anywhere, no matter where we look!”

“Umm...”

“It’s Lena!”

“...Uhh...” Not used to speaking with just her voice, Lena was at a bit of a loss,

so the Dark Queen lent her a helping hand.

“She’s saying those little sylphs will do what you tell them, so you can ask them to help look for Shadow!”

“Really?! Thank you, Lena!”

“...Welcome...”

“Hah! Lena thought of this brilliant plan all by herself!”

“Then why do you sound so proud, Marie?”

The sylphs carried the usual back and forth between Luca and the Dark Queen to us.

I could feel my heart warming up. Olivia and I weren’t alone. That realization alone made me feel like we could do anything. And I definitely couldn’t let Olivia’s determination to save Shadow wilt. That’s what I felt, very strongly.

“You’re all on a boat?”

“Indeed. The little elf searched the continent for us and couldn’t find a single blade of grass anywhere. Clowria disembarked to investigate, but she collapsed after walking around for a bit.”

“What?! Is she okay?!”

“Of course. She’s a powerful knight, so she’s perfectly fine!”

I didn’t know for sure, but it seemed like they were having some difficulties of their own. Was she really okay? I hoped she wasn’t hurt.

“Anyway, we came all the way here, but we can’t even get off the ship. If that’s how a Dark-kin fares, there is no way we can let human children go... But...” The Dark Queen hesitated. *“But we’re all worried about you, you know? We have no idea what to do...”*

Miss Dark Queen!

Just a little while ago, she wouldn’t even leave her bedroom, and now she was worried about us.

“Oh, in that case—” I sent a message through the sylphs to them, briefly describing our encounter with the slime and the shortcut. I also told them

about how we couldn't use magic in the castle.

"Haugh, I see. So if we can make it to that shortcut, we can get into the castle?" The Dark Queen mulled over that for a bit. *"Very well. Leave that to us, then. You focus on finding Shadow and the Hallows! It seems things are getting pretty dangerous over there, after all!"*

"Huh?" *Dangerous?*

The Dark Queen continued, her voice serious.

"Just a bit ago, I felt a magical response that seemed big enough to blow away the whole continent. It was super disturbing!"

It seemed like we didn't have much time.

"Twee!" The sylphs struck a pose, as if saying "Leave it to us!"

Everyone was with us now. We would definitely find Shadow and the Hallows.

"Here?"

"Twee! ♪"

The sylphs nodded emphatically. Wind could sneak around anywhere in the castle, so they could search every corner as they literally flew through it like a breeze. But what they eventually led us to...

"This is just a wall, though." It really looked like a normal wall.

"Twee, twee!" the sylphs huffed, as if they were upset I didn't believe them, and started punching my snout. These little fairies really were merciless.

"S-Sorry. There's a secret room here, isn't there?"

"Maybe it's like Miss Maredia's library?" Olivia pondered.

Long ago, a party of human heroes had sealed away the Dark Queen's library, full of her favorite grimoires (and her favorite comics too). I had accidentally broken the seal and opened it up again. Olivia really liked books, so she had grown quite fond of the place.

"In that case..."

I tried touching the wall, just like I had the door of the library back then. I could feel a huge amount of magic swirling behind it. I placed the tip of one of my thick claws on the wall. My claws had plenty of magic in them as well. A seal made by humans would be blown away in an instant. I didn't even notice when I was going through them. That should be more than enough for this wall!

"...Huh?"

It wasn't working.

"What do we do, Daddy?"

"Uhh, I don't really want to...but maybe I should try breathing fire on it?"

"Fire?"

"Yeah! Step back a bit." I couldn't transform into my human form, so maybe I was also having problems using my full strength. But I should have had no problem using my fire.

"Huh? What?!"

With a healthy boom, a pillar of fire appeared over the wall, but that was it. It wasn't nearly as strong as usual. It was like I had tried to light some wood for cooking and found that the log was soaked through.

"Well, that's not good..." I sank back into thought again.

"Daddy...?"

"Twee..." Olivia and the sylphs looked at me with concern.

Shadow was on the other side of this wall, and so were the Hallows. In that case...

"Olivia."

"Yes?"

"Umm. Could you look away for a second? And cover your ears too."

"Uhh... Okay."

After hesitating for a moment, Olivia nodded and stepped away. The sylphs were still staring at me, though some had copied Olivia and covered their eyes

and ears. It seemed they all had their own personalities.

“Okay.”

I was a dragon. I had spent a lot of my life sleeping and taking walks through the mountains. But I hadn’t always been that way. I had actually been quite mischievous in my youth. I even dug that huge hole in the ground once by accident because I was still half-asleep. So I understood that when dragons really went all out—

“Rrrraaaaagh!”

We were really, really strong. I made my body grow bigger. In an instant, I had grown so large I didn’t fit in the hallway anymore, so I shrunk back down a tiny bit. And then, I swung my tail with its full force.

“Yah!!!”

My tail slammed into the wall.

Long ago, when I had brought Olivia back to her village, in a fit of anger, I had given a small kick to the crude building she had used to call home. The shack had been totally blown away. That was right after I’d told her I would be her Daddy.

From that point on, I realized I would have to be careful. With my strength, I could solve almost any problem with a punch, a kick, or a swing of my tail. There was almost nothing I couldn’t break. However, if Olivia saw me do that, and if she realized that you could use power to force your way through any situation... I thought that would be a very bad lesson for a little human girl.

But—

“Hah!!!”

With a loud thud and the clattering of stone, the wall collapsed.

“Okay!”

Still, situations like this called for brute force. The wall had totally crumbled from my blow.

“Huh? Wha?” With her eyes and ears covered like I had asked her, I could

practically see the question mark pop out from her head. She was a very obedient child, following my instructions exactly.

“Okay, you can look now Olivia,” I said softly as I shielded her from the chunks of the broken wall.

“Okay... Whoa, the wall is broken! That’s amazing, Daddy!”

“Ha ha ha...” It looked like she really hadn’t seen what I’d done. Thank goodness. Brute force could solve many problems, but Olivia didn’t need to learn that yet.

Olivia jumped up on my back again. Now we could keep moving forward. Through the billowing clouds of dust, we could see a human man and a small figure lying on a bed—

And six brilliantly glowing jewels.

* * *

With a tense expression on her face, Maredia took her first step onto the Dead Continent—

“Waaah, it’s too scary!”

—or rather, she failed to.

“Yes, it seems that even reaching the shortcut they told us about will be difficult to accomplish before we are exhausted...”

“Haugh! Clowria, is it okay for you to be walking around already?!”

“Yes. I was able to recover, thanks to Miss Phyllis’s healing magic.”

“Huh. Pretty impressive, for an elf.”

“It is. Much more so than a certain Dark Queen, who is too scared to even touch the ground.”

“Guh...”

The pair had come to help Olivia. After learning that the land of the Dead Continent sucked the magic and life force from anyone who set foot on it, they had decided the children would have to stay on the ship. They couldn’t just leave them there alone though, so Phyllis and Esmeralda had been tasked with

watching over them. They were already quite used to watching over the girls, so they had been the obvious choices. So, naturally, the only ones who could disembark were the two Dark-kin.

“Ugh... Maybe we could just make a break for it...”

“I could transform into my hawk form and carry you in your cat form if you’d like.”

“Th-That’s perfect!” Maredia struck a pose. The plan was decided on.

“While you two are heading there, the rest of us will try and find another way to help Olivia!” Daisy said.

“Precisely!” Luca shouted emphatically. “We need to think of a plan to defeat a huge monster, should one appear!”

“Well, with Olivia’s dad around, we don’t need to worry about that...”

“Even so...”

They were all in agreement.

* * *

After flying for a bit, Maredia and Clowria fell to the ground. Relying on the sylphs to guide them forward, Clowria had ended up clipping a rock with one of her wings, sending them tumbling down. Once they struck the ground, they were transformed back into their normal forms.

This was the Dead Continent, a place where even a dragon couldn’t maintain a human form. Clowria had no chance on her own, and so was left huddled on the ground in her normal form.

The two Dark-kin gave defeated sighs. They had no other options. They would have to try and make it back to the boat. But as they thought that...

“Heh heh heh... Do you wish for more power?!”

An evil-sounding voice delivered a fittingly evil-sounding line. It was a voice that the two of them were quite familiar with.

“Father?!”

“Indeed! It is I, the Dark Emperor Thanatos!” It was Maredia’s father, Thanatos, the emperor of the Dark-kin and the ruler of the Dark Realm.



“To think the child prophesied to unite the Human Realm and the Dark Realm would be crawling around here,” he scoffed.

“Haugh...”

“Ahem, Father... Did you not just mention the other day that your relationship with your children has been strained all this time because you act like this?”

“Exactly! We decided at that family meeting we’d stop with all the playing cool and leaving room for misunderstandings!”

“Oh no! I had a chance at an epic entry scene so I totally forgot!” exclaimed Thanatos.

Maredia’s siblings stared at Thanatos, and the ruler of the Dark Realm felt the disapproving gazes of (three of) the Four Great Kings of the Dark Realm.

“Why are you here, Father?”

“Martell informed us of what was going on. The sylphs said, ‘Marie and her friends are in big trouble.’”

“Haugh, F-Father! Don’t call me that!”

Thanatos smirked.

“If I am told that my daughter is in trouble, it is my obligation as Emperor to run to her aid! Especially if a fellow father is in trouble as well!” With a flourish of his cape, a huge number of Dark-kin suddenly appeared behind him. “Luckily, this land has been sucked dry. Since it has no magical energy to protect it, our army can set foot in the Human Realm for the first time in a thousand years!” Thanatos gave a diabolical laugh, fitting of an evil emperor. Naturally, he was much more accustomed to such behavior than Maredia. He had had much more time to practice, after all.

“Go, Maredia! Walk, run, fly to your destination!”

“H-Haugh...? But how?”

“This is the answer of the Dark-kin!”

The army of Dark-kin ran past Maredia and Clowria...and then fell flat on their faces. Half of them threw themselves to the ground, while the other half

seemed to have simply collapsed from having their magic drained. The first of them had fallen immediately in front of Maredia and her family.

“What...?”

“Go! Climb over our corpses and reach victory! So what if we’re still alive!”

In short, if the two ladies couldn’t touch the ground, then they didn’t have to. He was telling them to make their way over the bodies of the Dark-kin soldiers.

“Whaaaaaat?! That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard!”

“Overwhelming strategies sometimes call for stupidity!” Even something so ridiculous said with such confidence was somehow convincing. “Now go!”

“Haugh...”

“Give my greetings to Olivia and the elder dragon!”

“I-I will repay this debt, Father!” Maredia began to run, leaving a bewildered Clowria in her wake.

“Th-Thank you, Sir Thanatos.”

“Clowria!”

“Yes?”

“Please take care of her for me.”

“...Of course.”

Maredia and Clowria. Each wore a ring representing the other, still sparkling on their fingers. Watching them run over the bodies of the fallen Dark-kin, Thanatos gave a satisfied smile.

Chapter 11: Mr. Dragon Faces Off

“Who are you?” It was an irritated voice.

Once the dust from the destroyed wall had settled, we were face-to-face with a scary-looking man—Vandilsen. He looked just like the man in my memories. But he had a totally different air about him now; the old carefree, fledgling mage I had met back then was nowhere to be seen. His expression was really scary.

On the bed in front of him was Shadow, fast asleep. Unable to maintain his human form, he was in his small white dragon form. Maybe he wasn't feeling well.

“Shadow!” Olivia leaped off my back and ran to him. “Kya!” But before she made it to his side, she ran into an invisible wall, falling to the ground. I hurriedly helped her up. Luckily, she didn't seem to be hurt.

The cause of the invisible wall was plain to see. Arrayed around the bed were six sparkling jewels: the other Supreme Hallows. I felt a much greater power from them now than I had at the Shooting Star Ritual back in Shutora. To think that adding just one more to the mix, the Leafwind Bow, would make such a big difference... They also looked way prettier than they had before. If it weren't for the situation we were in, my heart would have been stolen right there!

“A dragon...?” Vandilsen's expression grew darker.

I nodded. “Yes, I'm a dragon. Dragon Eldraco.”

“Dragon Eldraco? That's a bizarre name.” Vandilsen clicked his tongue. “I haven't seen an elder dragon for thousands of years. I didn't think there were any survivors. What are you doing here, and why with a human child?”

“Don't you remember? It's me.”

“What?” Vandilsen stared hard at me. “Are you saying...*you* are the elder dragon from Olympias?”

“That’s right. Long time no see.” Long, long ago, he had come to see me a single time. He had told me that he wanted to find the true meaning behind the power of magic, and so he’d wanted to talk with an elder dragon. He had looked really disappointed when I had just talked about the weather and seasons on the mountain, and about how the humans were really noisy and made it hard to nap.

“What are you doing here, now of all times? And what is with this human child?”

“I’m Olivia,” my adorable daughter introduced herself. “Olivia Eldraco! We came to get the Hallows back from you.”

“You? A dragon’s daughter?” Vandilsen stared hard at Olivia. The darkness had lifted from his expression, replaced with shock. And slowly, he started looking sadder and sadder. But in the end, an even scarier expression than before replaced it all. “So a dragon has a human daughter?”

“That’s right. He’s my Daddy—”

“Silence!”

“Ah!”

Vandilsen shouted, cutting her off.

Please don’t shout like that, you’re scaring her!

“Vandilsen, what are you doing with the Hallows?” I asked. “Shadow told us to come and stop you!”

“Shadow did...?”

“Yes. If you’re going to do something dangerous, I have to stop you. I want this to be a peaceful world so Olivia can live happily.”

Vandilsen laughed, as if he were mocking us. “Who cares about the world?”

“Huh?”

“I don’t care about any of those pathetic countries either. You said the same thing long ago, didn’t you, elder dragon?”

“Did I? So what are you trying to do, then?”

“It’s obvious!” Vandilsen shouted. “I’m going to save Shadow. I will save my precious son—no, I will save this proud dragon, who met such a terrible fate because I called him my son!”

Words began to gush out of Vandilsen, like the floodgates had been opened.

* * *

I couldn’t even remember how long ago it was. I had picked up a baby white dragon that was so weak it seemed like it might die at any moment. I had first thought it was a failed attempt to create a demidragon or dragon-kin, but it was a real, pure dragon. A creature I had thought went extinct long ago.

At first, I thought of it as nothing more than a resource to improve my magic. It would be a good enough research subject. But I ended up finding it cute. It could do nothing but eat the milk I fed it, and looked so frail compared to the other proud members of its species. No matter how long it lived, it never grew at all.

Perhaps this was due to something of a superiority complex on my part. Humans were petty, always fighting wars with each other and discriminating over stupid things, so I had grown sick of them. Taking care of a dragon might be a good change of pace, I thought.

...Who?

So, when the tiny dragon opened its eyes and spoke for the first time, I instinctively responded.

“I am... Well, I guess I’m your father.”

Thinking back now, it had been an incredibly foolish thing to say. I shouldn’t have said anything like that. We could have avoided having such a fun life.

“Dad, I saw a big fish jump. You said they’re called whales, right?”

“Dad, let’s sleep together tonight.”

“You’re a human mage, right, Dad? That’s amazing.”

Shadow and I lived together in a small cottage by the sea. It was a place I had

used to do my research, far removed from human civilization. We lived there, fishing and clamming, watching the sunsets together. By living with me, Shadow began to grow a little healthier and started to speak more. His frail constitution had been caused by the lack of magic required for him to grow properly, so I managed to come up with a spell to halt his growth.

I had lived alone for so long in search of the true meaning behind magic...but thanks to my eccentric behavior, I no longer had a place I belonged to anyway, be it the orphanage, the magic academy, or the royal court. Shadow was truly the first person I could call my family.

And it was fun. I didn't want to do anything that could hurt him.

"Dad... Are you going to die someday?"

Shadow looked up at me from his picture book, tears in his eyes. I had failed, I thought. I should never have gotten him that book. But I couldn't lie to him, so I nodded.

"That's right. Humans all die eventually. Far younger than dragons do."

"But I want to live with you forever..." he said, crying. So as a mage...no, as his father, I made up my mind.

"Okay. I'll do something about it."

The life span of a human was too short to accomplish much of anything, so I found a way to extend my own life span. It was the worst possible way.

"Shadow! Are you okay?!"

"I'm...fine... Dad, okay?"

Some flaw in the ritual had caused the spell to go wrong, and it started converting Shadow's life and magic into a longer life span for me. "How could this have happened?" I thought. Why were we suffering so much?

In order to find a way to break that curse, we traveled across the world, but no one would take us in. While in his human form, Shadow's silver hair and dark skin reminded many people of Dark-kin, and it earned us their animosity. Some

even drove us away because of my nature as an eccentric mage. When it came out that Shadow was actually a dragon, he was seen as dangerous, and many attacked him out of curiosity or for fame. Even if we avoided interacting with others, we were eventually exiled for having such long life spans despite not being elves. Humans were truly foolish creatures.

If the spell was broken, one of us would likely die. But as it was, Shadow was growing weaker and weaker. The presence of magic in the world had already declined so much that there wasn't enough to meet the bare minimum a dragon required to grow up healthy.

So I had to do something to protect both of us. We moved to a continent that we had been watching from across the sea. I drew an enormous magic circle and built a castle there. Using the magic and life force of that continent, I bought us a large amount of time. But even so, Shadow's health continued to decline, and he began to sleep more and more.

I will definitely save you.

From the moment I chose to be his father, it was obvious I had to take responsibility for him. I decided to search for the Seven Supreme Hallows so I could break this curse. I searched and searched and searched. I took over a large empire and created an army of demidragons. I drove them to war with the Philosopher-Queens of the elves, and stole the Hallow they possessed. I decided to smash that stupid school, full of children who were happy and healthy unlike Shadow, and take the Hallows from them.

I would take the tremendous amount of magic power hidden inside those jewels and pour it all directly into Shadow. If I did that, he could finally grow up strong and healthy. We could live together happily forever. Forever, just the two of us. Somewhere without any of the people who persecuted us, or the people who hunted Shadow for his rarity.

* * *

Light from the Hallows poured into Shadow. Vandilsen spoke to us, his gaze captured by the spectacle.

"So, Elder Dragon. Will you stop me now?" He turned to face us with a sad

smile. “A dragon raising a human daughter. You must have realized it by now as well. Your life spans are far too different. One day you will have to say goodbye.”

“Well, uhh...” Thump! I could feel my heart jump in my chest. That was something I had always avoided thinking about. Olivia was a human. I was a dragon. She had grown so much in the blink of an eye, and her life in this world would come to an end long before mine. That’s just what humans were. That was the fate of the little people.

“If there was a way you could live together forever, would you? Just the two of you, with no one else to interfere?”

“Umm...” I was at a loss for words. I wondered how Olivia felt about it all. She was still so small and adorable. I didn’t want her thinking about such sad things. I wanted her to always be smiling—

When I didn’t answer for some time, Vandilsen continued softly. “If your daughter could live just as long as you, what would you do?” he said. “An adult dragon could support a human life easily. Look at Shadow and me. So, what would you do?” He spoke as if it was a wonderful thing.

I couldn’t help but remember something from a short while ago.

When Vandilsen had come to our ship to save Shadow and helped him stand up, he had been so gentle, so careful. That’s right. I also felt Olivia was—

“No way.”

“...Olivia?”

Olivia’s voice was strong and resolute. Standing up from where the light of the Hallows had knocked her over, she looked between Shadow and Vandilsen, and then back to me.

“I don’t want anything like that.”

“What? Are you not afraid of dying?” Vandilsen asked. “Your father is a

dragon, a race that will live on and on. You are—”

“But I’m a *human*,” she said as if stating an obvious fact. “And everyone in my family lives a different amount of time. We’re a human, and a dragon, and some Dark-kin...but even so, I know everyone is always trying to find ways to make me happy.”

“...Yeah. That’s right. That’s right, isn’t it?” I spent so much time in my human form. I had read so many books on child-rearing. I’d thought she needed a home, so I had headed straight to ask for the Dark Queen’s castle. And I had thought she should go to school. “Because...I wanted Olivia to live happily among other people.”

“Sh-Shut up!” Vandilsen stomped. “You can only say that because you are a dragon. I cannot afford to take such a view. I cannot die and leave my child alone in the world!”

“It’s the same for humans, though.” I thought back to Daisy’s family. The awkwardness between them had been born out of her parents trying too hard to provide a secure future for her.

Parents just don’t live as long as their children. But that isn’t necessarily something so tragic.

“I always wanted Olivia...to live a happy life.” That was my one wish as Olivia’s father.

“And I want to live with Daddy forever,” Olivia said. “But...even if thinking about it makes me sad and makes me want to cry... Even if I never saw him again, he’s given me so much.”

The memories of all the books we’d read. Her friends from school. The other friends we’d met outside of school. The lively, warm days we spent living as a family of four. The memories of our time living in my shrine, just the two of us.

“They’re all my treasured memories.” Olivia began walking forward. She stepped up to Shadow’s bed, which she had been blocked from a moment earlier.

“Olivia!” This time I went with her.

“You know, Shadow asked us to stop his dad.”

“What?!” Vandilsen exclaimed.

“Why do you think he did that? The Seven Supreme Hallows can grant any wish...but wishing to live forever is kind of strange, don’t you think?”

A strong crackling sound reverberated from the Hallows as the light they gave off tried to push Olivia and me back. That was Vandilsen’s will. We were just intruders in his world, a world that contained nothing but him and Shadow. But is that what Shadow wanted?

Definitely not. Shadow loved Vandilsen just as much as Vandilsen loved him—and he knew how much his wish from long ago was making his Dad suffer.

“Hi-yah!” I forced my way through the light of the Hallows. Vandilsen stared at us, not believing what he was seeing.

“How...? If it was just a dragon, maybe I could understand, but a human girl too?”

“Because I’m his daughter!”

“That’s absurd!”

“We need to wake Shadow up. It’s weird for everything to be decided without him knowing.”

“Stop it! I’m his father!”

“Daddy always listens to me. When I was deciding whether I wanted to go to school, or becoming the King’s Pupil, he always asked me—”

“Stop!” Vandilsen threw his hands forward. He may have been trying to use powerful magic with the Hallows, like he had on the ship. The Hallows began to glow suspiciously, pouring their magic into Shadow. We couldn’t use magic at all. I was a tough dragon, so I needed to cover for Olivia.

“Just get out of here! You can’t tell me how to raise my son... You don’t know anything about us!” Vandilsen shouted. His fists were covered in a glowing light that looked dangerous to the touch. Vandilsen stepped forward as if he planned

on punching us directly.

“Look out, Olivia!”

At that moment...

“Guh?!” Vandilsen slipped and fell, his body making a loud thump as he hit the ground.

“Oh, that sounded like it hurt.”

“Wait, that’s...!”

At Vandilsen’s feet was a familiar, though somewhat disturbing, bubbling liquid.

“Gurglegleglegle!”

“Mr. Slime!”

“S-S-S-S-S-So you are Shadow’s father...?” The slime gurgled, its whole body shaking. It was hard to tell, but it was probably staring at Vandilsen.

“Why are you here, Mr. Slime?”

“T-T-T-T-Two kind gals helped me.”

“‘Gals’? What does that mean, Daddy?”

“No idea. It doesn’t sound like ancient Erial to me.”

“Wah hah hah! He means two kind, beautiful girls! Which would be us!”

“That voice!” I exclaimed.

“Let us go!”

“Indeed... Yah!”

We could hear familiar voices coming from above us. I spotted a cool-looking hawk and a cute cat: Clowria and the Dark Queen. Our precious family members, transformed into their animal forms, dashed gallantly forward toward the Hallows.

“My father’s precious Gem of Earth is ours again!”

“I have managed to secure the Gem of Water as well, My Queen. That was

the one Miss Luca was protecting.”

With two of their number gone, the remaining Hallows lost their glow.

“Miss Maredia, Miss Clowria!”

“You two came to help us, huh?”

“Of course we did! Our family was in trouble, after all!” the Dark Queen puffed up proudly.

“But how are you able to transform...? I thought you couldn’t use magic in the castle.”

“Heh heh heh. That is yet another result of my great deeds!”

“We found the shortcut Olivia mentioned and met the primordial slime there. It spoke to us...” Clowria explained.

“I-I-I-I-I-I was just about to fall asleep, when these gals woke me up.”

“The slime looked like it was in trouble, so we decided to help it out!”

“It seemed quite concerned about young Shadow and his father.”

“It told us all about this gross castle. And the slime showed us right in...and brought us to the huge magic circle under it!”

“A-A-A-A-As the last survivor on this continent, I was not just crawling around doing nothing all this time!”

“Magic circle...?”

“Wait, you... Are you saying you destroyed it?!” Vandilsen shouted, struggling to his feet as the slime clung to his legs. “That was the magic circle absorbing life and magic from everything on this continent. Do you have any idea how many *years* it took to build that?!”

“Heh heh heh, I scribbled all over it for you!” the Dark Queen declared proudly.

“You...! However, it doesn’t matter! Shadow already has the magic of the Hallows! That should be enough to fix the error causing me to steal life energy from him!”

“...Huh? Where are we?”

“Shadow!”

Having received power from the Hallows, Shadow suddenly popped up, immediately changing from his dragon form into his silver-haired human form. His cheeks were soft and plump, and his complexion looked much better.

“Dad...?”

“Shadow! Shadow! Ah, thank goodness...you look so much better!”

“That means... Dad, did you use the Hallows...?”

“Yes! Thank goodness... Ah, you’re finally healthy...now...!”

We all shared a look.

“I guess we don’t really need to stop him, do we?”

“Uh, well. Hmm...”

For some reason, Shadow had wanted us to stop Vandilsen from using the Hallows. Maybe he had just been overthinking things. It seemed Vandilsen was just trying to use the Shooting Star Ritual to make Shadow healthy again. And now, the dragon was looking much better.

Because of me, Dad can’t die anymore.

That’s what Shadow had told us. The fact that parents often died before their children was sad. But what if there was a way to make them live longer? I couldn’t help but think about that.

“If that’s all he’s going to use them for, why not just wait until he finishes releasing their magic to take them back...?” As I thoughtlessly said that...

“Dad... No!”

“Huh?”

Shadow leaped up on unsteady feet. And then—

“What?!”

He knocked the other Hallows off of their places around his bed.

The Gem of Wind split in two.

The Gem of Fire shattered on the ground.

“Wait, Shadow?!”

“Please, the others... Slime!”

“V-V-V-V-V-V-Very well!”

“Haugh?!”

“Kyah!”

The slime leaped up off the ground. It grabbed onto Clowria and the Dark Queen with a squelch, knocking the jewels from their hands.

“Ah, the Hallows!”

The Gem of Earth broke apart.

The Gem of Water crumbled.

“What are you doing?!”

“Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh-Shadow has been waiting for this moment...to prevent his father from doing something so foolish ever again.”

“What are you talking about?!”

“Stop it, Shadow! If we have those jewels, you can be healthy forever... We can live together...” Vandilsen reached out to grab Shadow’s arms, his own arms stretching out from his luxurious robes. Olivia exclaimed in surprise the moment she saw those arms. They were thin and weak, like withered branches.

“I already know you’re lying...! I hate it! Dad, you’ve been suffering this whole time!”

Everyone else in the room was silent.

“I don’t want you, suffering more! This is, wrong!” Tears in his eyes, Shadow threw off Vandilsen’s grip. “Waaaaah!”

The Gem of Light’s pieces were scattered across the floor.

The Gem of Darkness was crushed.

All six of the Hallows had been destroyed.

“Wh-What is going on?”

At that moment...

“Shadow, I am sorry... It’s too late.”

“Huh? Dad...?”

“Guh!” Vandilsen dropped to the floor.

“Dad... S-Sorry, I...”

Vandilsen’s body was withering away as we watched. His once-youthful hair grew white, and his soft skin started to wrinkle. He was aging before our very eyes.

Vandilsen coughed painfully. “I already...cut the link... Thank...goodness... As expected...of the Hallows...”

“Dad! Dad!!!”

“Sorry, Shadow... You were always watching me, weren’t you?” Vandilsen’s breathing was growing ragged.

Ah. He had been lying the whole time.

I finally understood. Shadow had told us that his father couldn’t die anymore because of him. But that was a lie. The truth was, Vandilsen could die at any time. He had extended his own life span by force, bearing the suffering that entailed. He had lived alone in this castle with Shadow that whole time

He did it so that one day, Shadow could be healthy.

“I thought...with the power of the Hallows, even a human like me could increase his life span, but it seems I wasn’t quite skilled enough...”

“Dad... I...I...”

Vandilsen continued to grow weaker and weaker while Shadow was growing stronger and stronger. All we could do was watch.

“I-I-I-I-Indeed. The more one defies nature, the more one suffers.”

“Mr. Slime?”

“H-H-H-H-H-His greed brought this continent to ruin, and using Shadow’s magic, he obtained a long life of suffering. He tried to bury his own loneliness under his son Shadow...but it was all a mistake.”

“Bury his loneliness...?”

“Y-Y-Y-Y-Yes. Living creatures cannot thrive without reaching outside of themselves. That even goes for me, a slime that reproduces by dividing itself.”

“Reaching outside...”

“Haugh... That is painful for a shut-in like myself to hear.”

“Do not worry, my liege. You can take your time to improve yourself.”

“True, I suppose... But still, this formless lump is getting quite philosophical.”

“H-H-H-Ho ho ho. That is because I took on parts of all the life on this continent.”

“What?!”

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Where do you think all this water came from? Th-Th-Th-This body is made up of the water from boars, deer, butterflies... All the living things of this continent.”

“G-Gross...” The Dark Queen’s face twitched. Life changed forms as it turned into other things. I had learned the same thing, watching over my mountain for so long, but hearing it come from the creature itself was a bit off-putting.

“Ah! D-Daddy!”

“Uh...whoa! Olivia!”

We all stared in amazement. Olivia’s behind was glowing brightly in a rainbow of colors.

“Wh-What’s happening?!”

“Olivia’s turning into a rainbow firefly?!”

“That is not it at all,” Clowria said. “Look closely. It is coming from her pocket!”

Upon closer inspection, it was actually her *bag* that was glowing. A ball of rainbow light shone from inside it.

The slime gurgled. “What immense magic. It is the same as those stones earlier, or perhaps even greater...”

“With this much condensed magical energy, maybe—”

“It’s glowing super bright! It’s the Lost Origin!” Olivia pulled the brightly glowing Lost Origin out of her bag, filling the room with a blinding light.

“Wh-What, is that...?” Vandilsen’s eyes went wide. He had wasted away so much it seemed like he might die at any moment, but that didn’t stop the researcher in him from rising to the surface, shock and interest plain on his face. It reminded me a little of the Vandilsen I had met so many years ago.

“Maybe this is the real Shooting Star Ritual...?”

The Hallows were broken into pieces all around us, but it seemed all of their magic had somehow been gathered into the Lost Origin. Even I, who had lived for so long, had never seen so much magic in one place. The sight sent a chill through me.

“Seven glittering lights to one star.

One star for one wish.

Grant it and shine, Shooting Star.”

“I see... The song. ‘One star’...” Olivia stared at the rainbow in her hands. “So, it can grant...any wish...?” The Shooting Star Ritual. A magic ritual that could grant any wish. “Shadow, umm...” Cradling the rainbow light carefully in her arms, Olivia called out to Shadow, but Vandilsen interrupted her.

“Ha ha, aha ha ha... I see. I had not even completed the ritual... How would I have known a song passed down by humans?” As he coughed painfully, Shadow clung to his father with a cry. Olivia watched them closely.

“Use that light. Destroy me...”

“No.”

“Then, will you take a long life span in my place? So that you can live together with your dragon...”

“I don’t want that either.”

“Then what will you wish for?”

Olivia rummaged through her bag, pulling out some of the plant-acea. A herb that could cure any illness.

“This made Shadow feel better too.”

“What are you doing...?”

“I’m going to give you—”

“Stop.” Vandilsen immediately cut her off. “I am already... I do not wish to hurt Shadow any further.”

“Dad...”

“Sorry, Shadow... I wanted to stay with you forever. But it looks like...I’m going to end up leaving you alone after all.”

Suddenly a terribly loud noise rocked the castle.

“Wha?!”

“This castle will collapse soon. It was supported by the magic circle below it, and by my power.”

“Dad, no... Don’t die! Don’t leave me alone...”

“Shadow...”

“I don’t want you to suffer forever, but...but...”

“It’s okay, Shadow...”

A loud rumbling filled the air as the castle began to collapse. The castle, where Vandilsen and Shadow lived alone.

“N-N-N-N-No one will survive at this rate,” the slime muttered.

“Haugh! This is bad!”

“It is collapsing too quickly! We must secure an escape route!” Clowria

exclaimed.

“But how?!” the Dark Queen shouted. “There are no doors in this room, let alone windows!”

I grew in size. The falling debris from the castle was barely noticeable to a dragon.

“Look out!” I covered Olivia, Vandilsen, and Shadow.

“Daddy.”

“Elder Dragon...” Vandilsen looked up at me. There was a light in his eyes, just like I had seen back then—long, long ago, when I had met Vandilsen the first time. “Ah, that is right... When I first found Shadow, I remembered you. You were large, graceful, powerful... I thought about how wonderful it would be if Shadow grew strong like that elder dragon one day...”

“Dad...”

“I know this is a selfish wish, but...Shadow, please be happy. Even without me here, you can definitely, find happiness...”

“Dad...”

“I’m sorry...for making your world so small and cramped.”

The Dark Queen shouted. “Look out! It’s falling down!”

“Everyone, come here!”

“But how are we supposed to get out?!”

* * *

Aboard their ship floating on the sea, Phyllis shouted triumphantly.

“Come, my students! It is time!”

Esmeralda laughed along with her. “Let’s go, my disciple!”

The girls nodded. “Okay!”

They had all put their magic together. Using Mr. Pao Pao’s shell as a launch pad and the sylphs to guide them—

“Show them the pride of the Dark-kin, my comrades!” The crowd of Dark-kin

roared in response. “Ready! Set!”

“Hurray! Hurray for the children!” the crowd cheered. The army of Dark-kin that had lost every drop of magic they had to bring Maredia and Clowria safely to the castle now cheered the children on.

“Friendship Beam...Fire!!!”

A massive hole opened in the side of the castle.

* * *

A gust of wind blew into the room. A hole had opened in the side of the castle, causing it to start collapsing even faster.

“Gyaaah! What the heck was that beam?!” the Dark Queen shouted.

“That was... It was everyone on the ship!” Clowria answered. We could see the sea from the new window on the side of the castle.

Vandilsen gave a bitter smile. “You really have a lot of friends, don’t you?”

“Yeah. I don’t get it at all, Dad. There’s a dragon, with his human daughter...and Dark-kin friends...”

Olivia looked up. Holding the brilliantly shining seven-starred jewel in her arms, she stared at Shadow.

“Olivia, let’s go!” The castle would fall on us any minute now. This was no time for the Shooting Star Ritual. The Dark Queen changed into her cat form, and Miss Clowria carried her in her talons. “Olivia, get on my back! You too, Shadow! Vandilsen!”

“Are you stupid?” Vandilsen smiled, blood dripping from his mouth. “How can a man that destroyed an entire continent hope to live? More importantly, save —”

“Save Shadow,” he was going to say. But as he tried to speak, a huge piece of the castle collapsed, dropping a piece of debris right above him.

“Dad!”

“Shadow!”

Shadow threw himself over Vandilsen to protect him from the falling chunk of

stone, aimed right for Vandilsen's head. But such a small child couldn't do anything. But before I could even tell them to look out, Olivia started shouting from my back.

"Seven glittering lights to one star.

One star for one wish.

Grant it and shine, Shooting Star!"

She hadn't said her wish out loud, but I was sure it was the perfect one.

"Shadow..."

A huge, powerful, pure white dragon spread its wings. It was the exact form of Shadow that Vandilsen had always hoped to see.

"Dad..."

"Shadow!"

He had gone about it all the wrong way, and there had been no one around to correct him. In the end, he had been left walking down the wrong path all this time. His dream, to see Shadow grow up, was at the end of a path he could never reach by himself.

"Amazing. I feel like I could do anything."

I leaped up into the sky, making my way out of the collapsing castle. Clowria and the Dark Queen were safe. We could hear cheers from the ship. From where we were, it looked like a small leaf floating on the sea.

Olivia stared up into the sky as her wish took flight, a pure white dragon soaring into the clouds, taking his one and only father with him.

"Daddy."

"What is it, Olivia?"

"I'm really glad I'm your daughter."

"Yeah," I nodded. "I'm a dragon, and you're a human. We have different life spans, and different strengths." I had tried so hard to avoid thinking about our

future. “But I love the world you live in.”

We weren’t alone. We had plenty of family and lots of friends. And there were so many people we were still going to meet. What would Olivia take from this world, and what would she leave behind? I was looking forward to seeing it all—after all, I was her Daddy.

* * *

It was the first time I had ever flown so high in the sky. I never thought I’d be able to do something like this. After so many thousands of years, this was like a miracle.

“Amazing. So these are your wings?” With my wrinkled father in my arms, I soared. He seemed so happy. “You met some impressive people when you ran away from home...and you even knew a talking slime... I...never knew...”

Dad’s heartbeat was growing weaker and weaker. As a dragon, I should have been able to save a single person.

“It’s okay, Shadow.”

“But Dad...”

“I have already lived too long... My body can’t take the magic inside it anymore. You understand, don’t you?”

I couldn’t accept it. I wanted to stay with him forever. But that was our very first mistake—the first button we never should have pressed. The button the elder dragon and Olivia hadn’t pressed.

“I’m sorry, Shadow.”

“Dad... Come on. We can still live a long time together. We can meet lots of people... But...maybe not.” With the wings Olivia had given me, I carried my favorite Dad through the air. “Thank you, Dad. For everything.”

“Shadow... Go make lots of friends. And live, happily...”

Dad slipped gently from my arms, falling to the land he had turned into the Dead Continent below. It had never been particularly abundant with life, nor had any civilization developed there.

“Ah!”

The magic left in his body and returned to the earth. And then...

“It’s turning green...”

Magic returned to the earth below. The blue sea and the green land. It reminded me of the cottage we used to live in by the sea. That place had also been full of greenery, sitting alongside an endless sea and sky.

“Goodbye, Dad.”

I was now alone in the world.

...No, that wasn’t right.

“Heeeey!”

The elder dragon and his daughter waved at me.

That’s right. I already—

But, still, I couldn’t help but feel sad.

* * *

Olivia looked up into the sky from my arms as we waited on a ship filled with her friends and family members. Looking up like that, she looked somehow really mature.

“Hey, Daddy.”

In the bright blue sky, a white dragon was flying in circles. Shadow had grown up big and strong. The child of dragons who had grown up with no one but his human father. The empty blue sky suddenly clouded over and it began to rain, like the weather itself was mourning with him. But the raindrops themselves were warm.

Looking up above, Olivia whispered to me, concern in her voice. “Daddy, Shadow isn’t alone, right?”

“Right. He’ll be fine.” I didn’t know whether he really was okay. But I wanted to believe he’d be fine. Maybe it was just cheap platitudes, or maybe I was just

too carefree, not really knowing about humans or how to relate to others that well...but I was sure he'd be okay.

"Daddy."

"What is it?"

"Umm... Since I found you, I haven't been alone anymore."

"...Yeah."

"I have you, and Miss Maredia and Miss Clowria, and I have all my friends at school...but..." she said, still staring up at the dragon circling in the sky, her face looking as grown-up as ever. "But...there are a lot of lonely kids out there, aren't there?"

"I guess so."

Olivia nodded. "So, I've decided what I want to do."

"Oh? And?"

"Yeah. Every day is so fun, so I had never thought about what I want to do in the future. But..."

"Hm?"

"Someday, I want to be like you, Daddy. I want to help kids who are all alone like I was. I want to be a kind, strong person like you."

"Olivia..."

"After all, I'm Olivia Eldraco, your daughter!"

"Yeah, that's right."

Eldraco. That was the name Olivia had chosen for us. Long ago, it meant "like a dragon."

Olivia was still small. She was a student at the Florence Royal Academy for Girls, and the King's Pupil. But she was growing up, living in the human world.

"Is that so? I—"

No.

She lived in a world together with Dark-kin, dragons, dragon-kin, huge turtles

—she had friends of all shapes and sizes! But there was one thing that would never, ever change.

“I’ll always be on your side, Olivia.”

“Yeah!”

Olivia laughed, her smile as bright as the sun.



Epilogue

A few years later...

“Daddy!”

I turned to face the voices calling for me. And it wasn’t just a single one. Lunchtime had turned into a lively battle.

“What’s wrong, Art? Merul? Lute?”

“Daddy, Lute ate my bread!”

“No, it wasn’t me! Merul ate it!”

“Hey, Daddy! Let’s play some board games later!”

The little kids started babbling together. These were the kids Olivia had made friends with from all over the world. Just like her, they had been searching for a father they never knew. Humans, Dark-kin, elves...even dragons. No matter who they were, or how they found themselves here, children in situations where they couldn’t live with their parents had ended up gathering around us.

After graduating from the Florence Royal Academy for Girls, Olivia had begun working with the Florence Royal Academy Research Institute, and continued traveling around for her work as the King’s Pupil. Only those who graduated from the academy with exceptionally high grades were selected to join the Research Institute. They did all kinds of research to help people.

Meanwhile, I waited at our home on Mount Olympias for her to return. For a while, it had been just me, the Dark Queen, and Clowria living here, but at some point, things had grown quite lively.

“Come on, let’s enjoy lunch together.”

“Okay,” the kids responded in unison.

The scent of freshly baked bread was soon accompanied by a familiar voice.

“Haugh, you lot are all so noisy. A good kid eats up everything, politely eating

things they like and don't like all the same!"

"Mama Marie!"

"Look, I brought more bread for you."

"Yay!"

"My liege," Clowria chuckled. "Never mind the bread... Are you not going to eat those peppers?"

"Haugh, C-Clowria!"

"My beautiful queen?"

"Wh-What is it?!"

"Your peppers?"

"I-I was just about to eat them!"

"Aha ha, Miss Clowria got mad at Mama Marie again!"

"Haugh, shut up!"

Everyone laughed brightly.

I had gotten quite good at making food for a large number of people. The castle was a bit too big for the four of us that used to live here, but now it was full of children. On days when the weather was good, we would eat outside like this. The kids would help us care for the herb garden and do the laundry. And just like Olivia, they had all learned to smile happily again. It was a bit embarrassing for them all to call me Daddy.

Just as lunch was coming to an end, a bright and refined voice called out to us.

"Good day, everyone!"

"Daisy!"

It was Olivia's close friend, Daisy. She had grown into quite the woman. Her makeup and bright smile gave her an air of graceful elegance that caught even my attention.

"I came for an inspection. Also, I have some gifts from everyone from Class

Zero.” After graduating from the academy, Daisy had declined her parents’ request that she get married and begun working as a proper mage for the Palestria family. “I have some snacks from Kate, and a present from Lena... Ruby and Iriya donated some money as well. They all asked me to give you their greetings.”

“Yay!”

“I want to read *The Gentle Dark-kin* right now!”

“I love Kate’s snacks!”

“Haugh, wait until you’re finished eating lunch!”

“Then why are you reaching for the book already, My Queen?”

“Ack, I’ve been caught!”

As everyone started bustling about excitedly, a gentle male voice cut through the noise. “Everyone, quiet down.” Everyone turned to look right away. “Let’s finish lunch. This milk soup is really good.”

“Shadow!”

All of the children responded to his gentle insistence as one. He had become an integral part of all their lives here. And he was a fellow dragon. Vandilsen’s wish had been for Shadow to live happily, and Shadow was now working to help other children fulfill that dream as well. It seemed he had decided this was where he now belonged. The air in Olympias seemed to suit him quite well, so he was getting healthier by the day. He was even starting to grow a little taller.

Watching the excited children with a gentle smile, Daisy then turned to me and gave me a polite bow. “It has been quite a while, sir.”

“Yeah. Welcome back!”

“Mother and Father have also been asking to see you again.”

“How are they doing?”

“Now that I have begun work, they have settled into their retirement comfortably.”

“Oh, I’m glad to hear it.”

Daisy stared at me. Maybe she could see that I was starting to feel a bit restless.

“You look like you can’t wait another moment,” she chuckled.

“Huh?! R-Really? Uhh... I guess so.” Even though I was tens of thousands of years old, my feelings still showed on my face, plain as day. “Umm... Do you know when Olivia will be back?” But I couldn’t help it. After all, Olivia was coming home.

After saving the kingdom, or really the entire *world*, she had ranked up a bit from being just the King’s Pupil. She was now called things like “Hero” and “Saint”! It was like she was the main character of a picture book. Luckily, it seemed like Olivia herself didn’t mind at all.

After graduating from the academy, she still traveled around the world to save people. She reached out to crying children and took away the pain of those who were suffering. That was what she wanted to do.

Just like you saved me Daddy, I want to help others—

Daisy had been her partner in that endeavor.

“Do not worry, she will be back soon. However...”

“However?” Had she been hurt on the journey? Was she sick? I immediately went stiff with worry, but to assuage my fears Daisy shook her head, the gesture slowly turning into one of exasperation.

“Well... It seems Olivia did it again.”

“Did what?” What did she mean? I tilted my head in confusion, but suddenly, the sound of wingbeats filled the air. It wasn’t a bird, and it wasn’t a dragon either.

“Heeeey, Daddy!!!”

“Olivia?!”

There was a horse flying high in the sky. It was a powerful-looking horse with a glossy white coat. It had a pair of huge wings too.

“A horse is flying?! I guess there was that one human saying about flying horses... Or wait, wasn't it pigs?”

“Though we had thought they had gone extinct, Olivia found a pegasus. The whole kingdom is in an uproar again.”

“A pegasus?!”

Olivia waved to me from the horse's back. It was the same smile she had shown me on that snowy day so long ago, the day she first called me “Daddy.” She had grown taller yet again. She really wasn't a child anymore. But no matter how much time passed, she would always be Olivia, my precious daughter.

“Tee hee, Daddy!”

“Olivia!” I waved back. Olivia leaped off of the pegasus's back. She had grown quite skilled at her flying magic, something she picked up after admiring my ability to fly. On her chest, she wore a present from long ago, a brooch the same red as my eyes.

“Daddy!”

“Whoa, Olivia!”

Olivia jumped right onto me, her smile as bright as the sun.

“I'm home!”

“Yeah, welcome home, Olivia.”

Olivia, my precious daughter, who found a lone dragon like me and made me her Daddy.

Even if her world grew larger by leaps and bounds, no matter where she found herself in that world, I would always be a dragon. And I would always be her Daddy.

Her home would always be right here.

In the End

This diary was so thick that I thought I might never get to the end of it. However, these are the very last pages.

After Olivia and I met, many things changed.

I read many books on raising children. I started writing a diary in the human language. Our family grew quite large.

I never expected being a family with her would be so hard, and yet so much fun.

No matter what happens, I will always be a dragon. I will never be human. I can fly in the sky, I can breathe fire, and sometimes I forget just how strong I am. But none of that matters. I'm not alone anymore.

My daughter is a human. She lives along with the other humans. She laughs a lot, eats a lot, and sleeps a lot. Moment by moment, her life continues to shine. That little girl who crawled through the freezing snow and ice to find me and called a dragon her Daddy now has all sorts of family members around her.

The family we started together continues to grow and grow. We aren't connected by blood, and we're from totally different species. We sometimes get along, and other times we fight.

But no matter where she is in the world, we're family.

And that will never, ever change.

—Eldraco

DRAGON Daddy Diaries

A Girl Grows to Greatness

4



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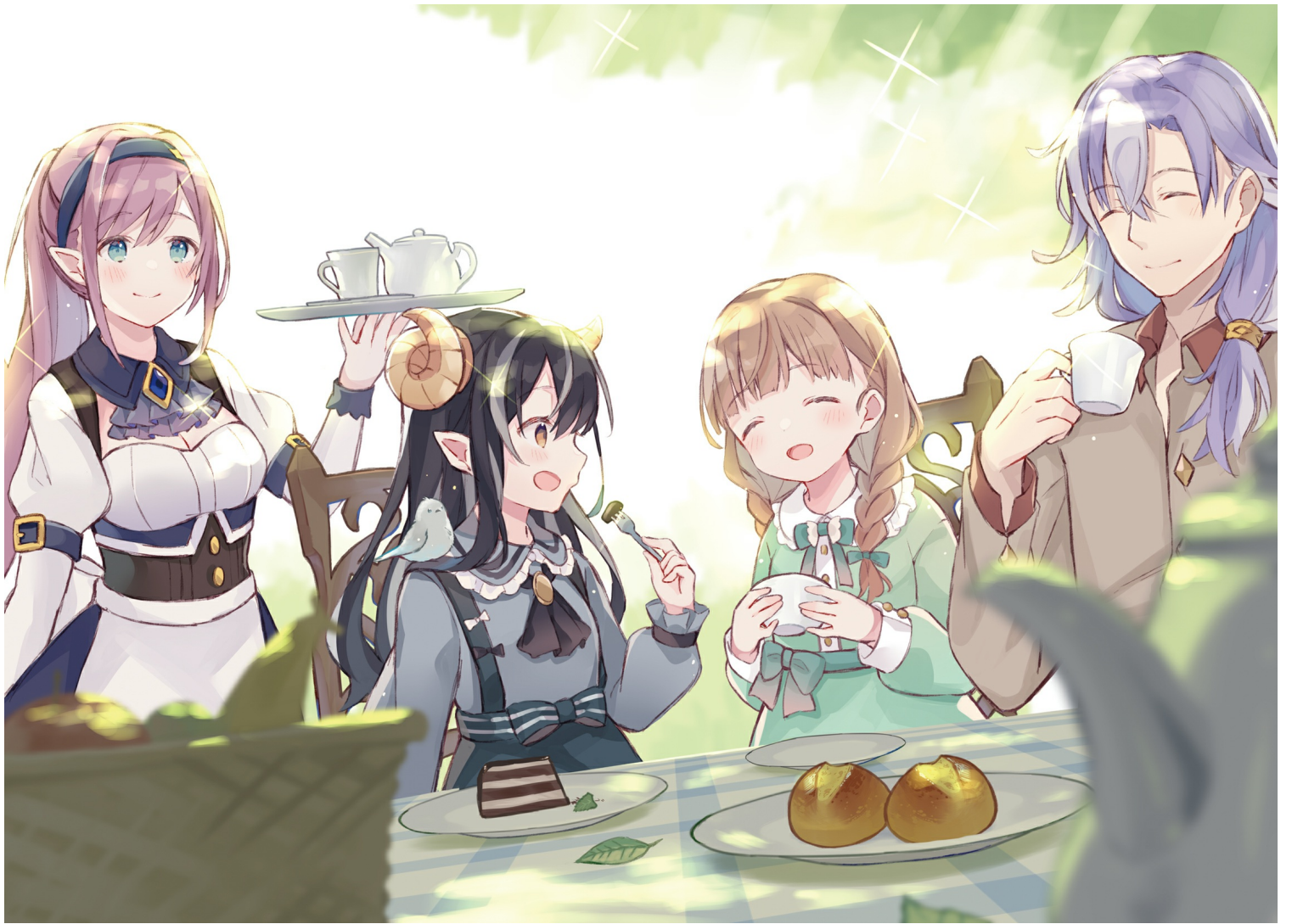






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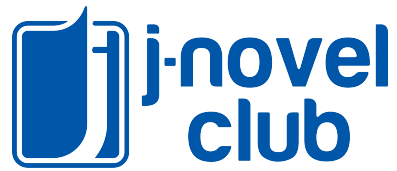
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Dragon Daddy Diaries: A Girl Grows to Greatness Volume 4

by Ameko Kaeruda

Translated by Nathan Macklem Edited by T. Burke

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